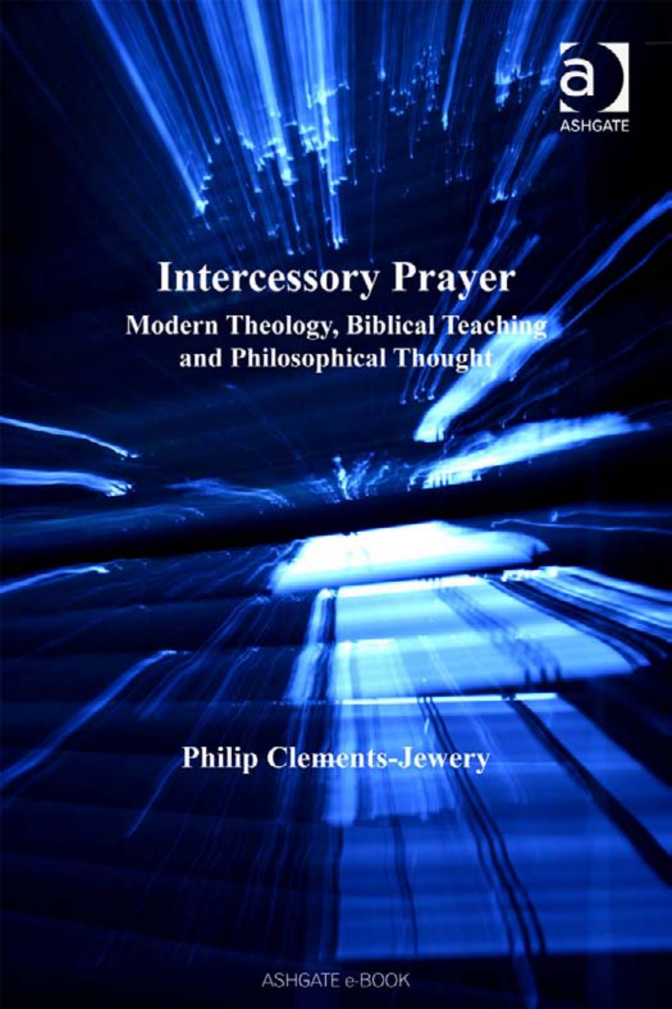


Intercessory Prayer

Modern Theology, Biblical Teaching and Philosophical Thought

Philip Clements-Jewery

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INTERCESSORY PRAYER

To Sue

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PHILIP CLEMENTS-JEWERY

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Contents

Preface

This book might never have come to be written if it had not been for the loving support and encouragement given me by my wife over a period lasting more than a decade. She has also been a partner with me in prayer, so in many ways what is written here is the product of a shared faith as well as of an endeavour that is more intellectual in its nature. It is only right that proper recognition should be given to her inspirational role in this project.

There are many others to whom tribute should be paid. My doctoral research was supervised by the late Revd Professor A.O. Dyson. Tony was a superb teacher who retained the ability, despite the illness from which he was suffering at the time, and which ultimately led to his death, to enthuse and energize his students. The work reflected in Chapters 2 and 6 was supervised by Professors Christopher Tuckett and David Pailin, respectively, and their advice also proved valuable. The Revd Dr Brian Haymes, formerly Principal of the Northern Baptist College in Manchester, and then of Bristol Baptist College, and now Minister at Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church in London, encouraged me to undertake the project initially and advised me in connection with the thought of H.H. Farmer, as described in Chapter 3. Most valuable (and challenging) has been the advice and guidance received since the award of my doctorate by the Revd Professor Paul S. Fiddes, Principal of Regent's Park College, Oxford. It was he who pointed out to me many of the loose ends that I needed to tidy up and the unresolved questions about which I needed to decide one way or another. My thanks go to all these who have been my mentors, but in addition to them mention should also be made of many individual friends and acquaintances who, on hearing of the nature of my work, have encouraged me by expressing interest in the topic with which I was wrestling. They now have the opportunity at last to read the finished work.

The initial postgraduate study could not have been undertaken without financial assistance from a number of sources. I would particularly like to express my gratitude for grants made by the Scholarship Fund of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Particular Baptist Fund, the MacClaren Fund of the then Lancashire and Cheshire Association of Baptist Churches, and the Merseyside Free Church Council.

I would also like to express my thanks to the deacons and members of Hamlet Baptist Church, Aigburth, Liverpool, for their generosity and patience in allowing me the time to undertake the initial research. At least I was able to offer in return a large number of sermons on the topic of prayer! Similarly my thanks also go to the deacons and members of New North Road Baptist Church, Huddersfield, where

I am at present minister, for letting me find the time during the first year of a busy pastorate to prepare the work for publication.

It was my experience in undertaking this project that my own faith in the validity and efficacy of intercessory prayer was deepened and strengthened. It is my hope and prayer that those who read this book will likewise find, not only that their understanding has increased, but also that their practice of prayer has been enhanced.

Philip Clements-Jewery
January 2005

Chapter 1

Issues in Practising and Understanding Intercessory Prayer

Preliminary Considerations

Do we really need yet another book about prayer? As a glance at the display in any religious bookshop will confirm, the number of books about prayer written for a Christian readership at the popular level appears greater than on any other spiritual topic. Furthermore, on superficial inspection, it would appear that there is no problem about the offering of prayers of intercession so far as most Christians are concerned. For Anglicans and Roman Catholics in particular there are the intercessions at the Eucharist. Prayer meetings also abound in homes and in Churches of all kinds. People get together in informal prayer groups. Business men and women and politicians gather for prayer breakfasts. So why write a book based on the presupposition of the possibility of doubt with respect to the validity of intercessory prayer?

The reason why this book has been written is that it is uncertain whether many of the numerous published books about prayer deal with the kind of issues that it is intended to address here. On the whole, academic works on the subject of biblical prayer seem to be descriptive and exegetical rather than enquire into the theological and philosophical basis of the matter.[1] And most popular books about prayer are of the 'how to' kind, or are exhortations to pray more. Few appear to be considering questions such as 'Why is it necessary to ask for God's gifts?', 'How is prayer possible?' and 'How does prayer work?'

A closer examination of the present-day scene might suggest that, in fact, all is not well in relation to the practice of prayer, particularly of the intercessory and petitionary kind. It is often the case that, in the public worship of Churches whose services are non-liturgical, particularly those of a 'charismatic' or 'renewed' nature, so much time may be given over to worship and praise that intercession may sometimes be left out altogether. It is possible that the practice of public intercession over a wide area of the current ecclesiastical scene may actually be in decline. If this is so, then it might prove instructive to speculate about the reasons why.

Although we can only guess, it is possible to think of some reasons for this *malaise*. The liturgical impoverishment of much modern Free Church and charismatic worship probably plays some part. There are also occasions when public intercession seems to be more concerned with informing human listeners about a given need than with asking God to do anything about it. At other times,

the intercessions may be reduced to little more than a 'shopping list' or a 'tour around the world'. All this may have led to some disillusionment in the matter of intercessory prayer. Of course, at the same time there have been some imaginative attempts to breathe new life into the concept of intercession. The development of 'prayer walking', particularly in the form of public marches of witness, with the procession stopping by buildings of importance to the wider community in order to pray for that particular aspect of the life of society, is one instance that comes to mind here.

However, the source of the problem with regard to intercessory prayer may not lie on the surface, but may come from deep within our psychosocial character. Society in general today has become more inward-looking and parochial. Post-modern culture promotes a hedonistic kind of individualism, with the result that we live in a 'me-first' generation where individuals expect there to be something for them in whatever they choose to do. The practice of intercession, however, does not easily fit in with this prevailing cultural ethos. There are few immediate rewards connected with the exercise of intercessory prayer. Sometimes there may be none at all. Indeed, we may never know this side of eternity whether our prayers have resulted in any tangible change in the world or in the lives of the people for whom we pray. Contrast this situation with that of a highly charged praise and worship event. It is obvious that in the latter the rewards for the worshipper are immediate. There is a 'buzz' in the atmosphere that anyone can pick up.

Psychologically speaking, what we are thinking about here is what is called 'instant gratification'. 'I know what I want, and I want it now!' is the watchword by which many live today. However, instant gratification is what children often ask for and, as suggested in the last paragraph, there is often no instant gratification so far as our prayers of intercession are concerned. Growing to adulthood means, among much else, learning how to accept delayed gratification and putting aside immediate rewards for the sake of some longer-term purpose or goal. It is possible, then, that the absence of public intercession in the worship of some Churches is a reflection of an immature spirituality. But I am also reminded of the frequent injunctions in the New Testament that Christians should be weaned off baby-food and consume something rather meatier (1 Cor. 3:2 and 14:20; 1 Pet. 2:2). It is for that reason that I intend to offer in this book a theological and philosophical rationale for the validity of intercessory prayer.

The origin of this book lies in a doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Manchester in 1996. As I began the research for my dissertation I became aware of the considerable lack of attention given by the world of scholarship to the subject of prayer in general and of intercession in particular. So far as I am aware, no major academic work on the theological and philosophical foundation of petitionary and intercessory prayer has been published in this area since the mid-1980s, at least so far as the UK is concerned, although there are signs that the situation is beginning to change.[2] There has also been some work done on the subject in the USA and, of course, there are paragraphs, sections and even whole chapters in works of a more general theological nature,[3] but there are few books at

any level that deal at length or in depth with the kind of issues in connection with intercessory prayer that are intended to be addressed in this book.

It is possible, of course, that the answers to such questions are assumed from the start, or are not even considered to be relevant. But another possible reason for this gap in the available literature on prayer might be doubt as to the basic validity of the exercise of prayer in the first place. Or, rather, to put it the other way round, the comparative lack of academic interest may also have made its contribution to the general *malaise* in connection with intercessory prayer that I have already described. Believers may not be interceding as much or even at all because they are not sure what they are doing when they do pray. The trouble is that they may not have been provided with the tools they need for such an understanding. Furthermore, they may hold back from praying because they have a suspicion of sub-Christian ideas of what prayer involves. No doubt, there are many 'magical' views of prayer held, if only unconsciously, by large numbers of Christians. I mean, for example, the kind of view that supposes that only if we pray harder and longer, or enlist more people to pray with us, God will in the end be bound to give us what we ask for, as if prayer in some way puts pressure on God so that eventually God caves in. The image here is of a somewhat harassed parent who, for the sake of a bit of peace and quiet, gives way at last to the repeated requests of the child who has gone on asking in the face of the parental 'no'. If that is the only concept of prayer on offer, then it is not surprising that some should find it unworthy of the God who has been revealed in Jesus Christ and, as a result, give up interceding altogether.

This raises an important issue so far as an understanding of intercessory prayer is concerned: that of the relationship, on one hand, between the kind of beliefs held by the person who prays and, on the other, the actual practice of that person's prayer. There is no doubt that the practice of prayer has had an effect, not only on beliefs about prayer, but on Christian doctrine generally. However, it is open to question whether this has always been the effect that it should have had (Wiles, 1967, pp.93, 164, 168). There is a tension between taking spiritual experience as the starting point for theological reflection and wanting to develop an argument within the limits of philosophical theism. One example of what is meant here is given at the end of the previous paragraph, where the practice of persistence in prayer may in some circumstances give rise to unworthy images of God. But the process works in the opposite direction as well, for a view of God reached independently of devotional practice and starting from a more philosophical view of the divine may result in the reduction of intercessory prayer to what is theologically acceptable, for instance, to a mere 'Your will be done'. If intercession is thus restricted to a seeking and an accepting of God's will as it concerns the person or situation being prayed for, possibly with a commitment also to personal action in relation to that person or situation, then many intellectual problems in connection with intercessory prayer will simply evaporate. Whether this is necessary is another matter, and is an issue to which this study will address itself. On the other hand, allowing devotional practice to affect the formation of views of the nature of God exposes one, especially in relation to this particular study, to the

charge of assuming from the start what we want to prove, so that we become involved in a certain circularity of argument.

The answer to this dilemma is surely to admit that the relationship between the practice of prayer and doctrinal beliefs can only be a dynamic one. In fact, theology and the practice of prayer have a mutual influence. As Patrick D. Miller says, 'prayer and theology exist in relation to one another in a correcting circle, the one learning from the other and correcting the other' (Miller, 1994, p.1). It is right that devotional excess should be subject to the corrective influence of a sound and reasonable belief. On the other hand, the cold and abstract view of God as 'the God of the philosophers' may be overcome by recognizing that prayer belongs to a relationship with God that is fully and warmly personal.

It is already becoming clear that an enquiry into the nature of intercessory prayer will require us to reflect deeply on the nature of the God to whom we pray. The development of a theology of prayer is a test-bed for our doctrine of God. In the course of this study we will need to consider the precise nature of God's knowledge and power. We will need to take a fresh look at the classical doctrine of God's impassibility or immutability: the question as to whether God is affected in any way by what happens in the world. We shall have to ask questions about the basic structure of the world, what is known as *metaphysics*. The Christian doctrine of God as Trinity will also be brought in at some point.

There is another matter to be dealt with before we embark upon our study. Possibly there is another way to establish the validity of intercession that may avoid the necessity of hard thinking. Would putting prayer to the test of scientific experiment serve to short-cut all the philosophizing and theologizing? Over recent decades there have been a number of scientific experiments to test the efficacy of prayer. As this introductory chapter was being written there was considerable publicity in the media concerning this experimental evidence for the efficacy of prayer, including a prime time TV programme entitled *Does Prayer Work?* A recent study in the *British Medical Journal* (Leibovici, 2001) generated considerable discussion, much of it, however, cautious or sceptical.[4] Another was reported at the Festival of Science, held in Manchester in September 2003 under the auspices of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, where neuropsychiatrist Dr Peter Fenwick gave delegates the results of separate studies[5] into prayer by groups of strangers for cardiac patients and for women having IVF pregnancy treatment. He reported that nearly 400 San Francisco cardiac patients took part, not knowing if they were in the sample being prayed for. Those in the group prayed for had fewer complications, needed less drug treatment and recovered more quickly. In the IVF study, success rates doubled when patients in Australia, USA and Canada were prayed for by Christians in Korea (Kwang *et al*., 2001).

However, more probably cannot be claimed at present than that these experiments are inconclusive or, rather, that the conclusions drawn are debatable. Over the whole range of studies, criticisms are aimed both at the experimental methods employed and at the interpretation of the results. One objection is that in this area there can be no such thing as a controlled experiment. The researcher

cannot know whether or not other people outside the experiment are praying for those involved, so that if outsiders, such as family or friends, were praying for those in the control group (that is, those not being prayed for by people in the experiment), this would seriously affect the results, provided, of course, that prayer actually works. Moreover, experiments can only show whether or not there is a statistically significant difference in outcome between those prayed for and those not prayed for, so that it is possible that other conclusions may be drawn from the data than simply that prayer either does or does not work. Even if the experiment showed that there was no significant difference in outcome between the prayed-for and those not prayed for, this still might not prove that prayer does not work, since the lack of statistically significant difference might still be due to the effect of unknown prayer on the control group who might have received as much prayer as the others even though they were considered to be unprayed for.

There are other objections, too. It is possible to argue that the model of prayer that is used in such experiments is too mechanical. Its somewhat 'coin-in-the-slot' approach to the matter seems to compromise the freedom of God in responding to the prayer. Indeed, the personal agency of God is left out altogether from the scientist's considerations, and this is at odds with the kind of personal relationship with God which, it will be argued in this book, lies at the heart of the activity of intercession. It is also unlikely that believers will be satisfied by being told that there is a 'statistical probability' that their prayers will be answered, since faith operates with an 'all-or-nothing' approach. In other words, the scientific study of prayer suggests a degree of tentativeness that contradicts the sort of faith and wholehearted commitment considered necessary to the exercise of intercessory prayer.

Brümmer (1984, pp.2–7) amplifies these and other reasons why scientific research into the efficacy of intercessory prayer may be flawed. Firstly, in an argument similar to the one employed above in the previous paragraph, the person who prays comes to that activity with a heart and mind fixed on God and committed to seeking, discovering and submitting to God's will. However, the open-mindedness with which scientists approach their experiments precisely rules out this kind of commitment. Hypotheses being tested in a scientific experiment are always held tentatively until they are either verified or falsified, but no one ought to expect prayer to be answered on that basis, for it excludes the kind of faith that is necessary for prayer to be effective. Subjecting prayer to a scientific examination might also be considered as falling into the category of presuming upon God. Furthermore, all scientific theories are generalizations, and experiments must always be repeatable, but it is doubtful whether the conditions under which a specific prayer is made are ever repeatable. Finally, even if the efficacy of prayer appeared to be falsified by the experiment it would still be possible for believers to say that it was their fault because they were wrongly seeking to put God to the test. In short, therefore, putting prayer to the test of scientific experiment may not, in fact, prove anything.

So we still have to find answers to the three basic questions that need to be asked in connection with an understanding of what happens when we pray: (i) Why is prayer necessary? Why does a good God need to be asked before giving us what

we need? (ii) How is prayer possible in the light of certain historical views about God? And (iii) how does prayer 'work'? Is it really conceivable, given the world-view which most people hold today? Consideration of these issues will be preceded by a look at part of the biblical material relating to our theme. Out of all this, it is hoped, will emerge a fresh understanding of the nature of petitionary and intercessory prayer leading to a renewed confidence in its validity and relevance.

The purpose of this book, then, is to show that an intellectually respectable, logically coherent and theologically satisfying account of petitionary and intercessory prayer is possible in the light of certain strands of biblical teaching and of modern theological and philosophical understanding. It will be argued that prayer is a means by which the supremely personal God enlists the freely-given cooperation of human persons in the realization of the divine purpose. Through prayer, God gets certain things done in a way that may not have been fully possible had the prayer not been made. In other words, prayer must be seen as a personal partnership, not only between God and the one who prays, but also between God and the people (and situations?) prayed for. The act of intercession thus reinforces the personal nature of the universe. As an instance of faith active in love, prayer both makes certain possibilities greater and strengthens the likelihood of divine response, so that those who pray may have every confidence that their prayers will make a difference to the world, through the God who both influences and is influenced by the creation.

Examples of Contributions to the Debate about Prayer

Before continuing any further with our enquiry it would be valuable at this point to mention a few authors whose work is not otherwise referred to in the remainder of this study. Brief descriptions and assessments of three different but overlapping contributions to the debate about prayer will be provided: the phenomenological, the philosophical and the doctrinal. It will become evident in the course of this brief survey that the main issues already mentioned as needing to be addressed in a study of the nature of petitionary and intercessory prayer will again be brought to the surface.

The classic twentieth-century phenomenological study of prayer is that of F. Heiler (1932). This essentially descriptive approach is also taken by Maurice Nédoncelle (1964) and it is his work that will be examined here. Nédoncelle builds much of his argument on the use of analogy. He begins by analysing what he calls 'prayer as from man to man'. Such prayer, he claims, belongs in the 'domain of the vocative', between the extremes of command and declaration. It is above all petitionary and, as such, it is also contemplative (in that it needs a personal presence) and devotional (because it backs up the request with an offering). This kind of 'prayer' thus expresses the bond that exists between persons. Those who pray are making an acknowledgment of their inadequacy, and they also discover exactly what they want as a result of the interaction between the one who prays, the recipient of the prayer, and the prayer itself.

Nédoncelle follows these observations with further ones about the role of the recipient of prayer, leading to an affirmation of the nature of the relationship as being characterized by 'I–Thou'. However, this last recognition does not exclude the possibility of the existence of a hierarchy in prayer, for the one addressed is usually superior to the one who prays. Finally in the first section of his book, Nédoncelle draws out the element of the Holy in inter-human prayer. The Holy is present because the command to love our neighbour is akin to the command to love God. This suggests that prayer between humans is one of the possible climaxes of divine charity. Human prayer thus discovers its origins and horizons in God.

The second section of the book is concerned with prayer to God. Nédoncelle begins by asserting the radical difference between prayer to God and prayer to another human person. This assertion is perhaps surprising, given Nédoncelle's desire to build an understanding of prayer to God on the analogy of prayer between humans. There has to be a degree of similarity for the analogy to work. Of course, analogy can lead us into the dangers of anthropomorphism. On the other hand, a reaction too far in the opposite direction might lead us via deism into agnosticism, in spite of it having been observed that an element of deism is necessary in any satisfactory Christian theology in order to preserve the relative independence of the world *vis-à-vis* God (Baelz, 1968, p.67). However, this does not mean abandoning the ultimate dependence of all things upon the creative will of God. For such reasons, Nédoncelle is careful to affirm both the transcendence and the immanence of God.

After analysing the psychological stages of prayer, Nédoncelle continues by considering its traditional divisions. It is interesting, for the purposes of this study, that he considers petition to be fundamental to the nature of prayer as a whole: 'all prayer is in a sense a form of petition, and this is a petition for the divine Spirit' (Nédoncelle, 1964, p.103). But this has to be set within the context of a desire for union with God. The love of God is therefore the end of prayer as well as the origin of its forms. Among these forms is intercession, which Nédoncelle sees as essential for any advance in civilization because of the way it widens both our horizons and our sympathies. It is therefore the sovereign remedy for our selfishness, as thanksgiving is in similar fashion the antidote to despair.

Nédoncelle next considers the standard difficulties in connection with petitionary and intercessory prayer, which might at first sight be considered to reflect a lack of piety or forethought. Also the facts might or might not provide any evidence of its effectiveness. Speculative thought is no more favourable, for it raises an issue dealt with later in this book: would not an omnipotent, omniscient and wholly loving God act for our good without first being asked? Nédoncelle replies to this question in terms similar to an argument mentioned in Chapter 3, that the need to ask is connected with our personal development in our relationship with God.[6] He also quotes Augustine and Aquinas concerning the ability of prayer to make us capable of receiving God's gifts, and asserts that we pray in order that we might become aware of both God and ourselves. Nédoncelle concludes his study by addressing issues that are specific to Christian prayer. It is

Christocentric, communal and liturgical. He also considers the nature of mystical prayer.

It is clear that this phenomenological approach complements the theological and philosophical approach of the personalists whose thought will be considered in a later chapter. The mutuality of persons, human and divine, finds its perfect manifestation in prayer, implying that the loss of prayer also means the loss of the person: 'The chief danger that threatens to impoverish mankind is not only the fact that men are ceasing to raise their hands in prayer to God; it is also the fact that they are ceasing to regard the human individual as a sacred being' (ibid., p.181).

A second approach to the understanding of the nature of prayer is the philosophical one. A major contributor to the understanding of prayer here is D.Z. Phillips (1965), but before coming to his work we must give a very brief consideration of the thought of Peter Geach (1969, pp.86ff). For Geach, contingency in the natural world is necessary in order that human choices may have the scope to affect the natural world. Prayer belongs to this realm of contingency. There is, in fact, a two-way contingency involved, in that the prayer may or may not have been offered and that what is asked for may or may not be granted by God. Moreover, it is rational to pray only concerning future contingent issues, for what is past cannot have two-way contingency. Geach asks if we can say after a prayer has been offered whether what it has brought about is what God was not going to bring about before the prayer was made. He is not sure that an affirmative answer to the question implies a 'real' change in God's will, because the notion of 'real change', even when applied to creatures, is not clear.

In *The Concept of Prayer*, Phillips provides an important philosophical treatment of prayer. In it he puts forward his view that philosophy, in respect of religion, can do no more than give an account of what religious people do. Its purpose is not apologetic. Philosophy cannot justify 'the validity of religious statements', and is concerned, not with the verification of truth, but simply with meaning. All it can do is to provide 'a norm of meaningfulness' (Phillips, 1965, p.6). Phillips also discusses the grammar of prayer (ibid., pp.30ff). He claims that the meaningfulness of religious concepts is to be found within religion itself. He uses the expression 'talking to God' as a definition of prayer. This is, of course, an analogy, although Phillips is careful to point out that there are important differences between talking to God and talking to another person. Nevertheless, although God is not a participant in language (and prayer, while it is talking to God, is not a conversation), God is to be found *in* the language people learn when they come to learn about religion. However, while it might be agreed that talking to God is not the same as talking to another human being, if an argument for the personal nature of our communion with God is made, as it is later on in this book, then it might be claimed that, since language is a normal means of communication between persons, God may be more a participant in language than Phillips is prepared to allow.

For Phillips, an important aspect of prayer is its connection with self-knowledge, although it must not be understood as, or explained in terms of, talking to oneself. The importance of petitionary prayer depends on the place it plays in the life of the person who offers it (ibid., p.115). He suggests that, philosophically

speaking, what it means to ask God for something or to say that God has answered the petition requires a taking into account of the relationship to God within which the prayer is made (ibid., p.120). Prayer cannot, therefore, be an attempt to influence the way things go. Petition can be no more than an acceptance of the way things are and an expression of a desire to carry on, whatever happens (ibid., p.123). There is, therefore, an internal relation between prayer and religious development. This would appear to be in agreement with the thought of a number of other contributors to the debate who, in connection with their understanding of impetratory prayer, emphasize the importance of the personal growth of those who pray in their relationship with God.

By the same token, intercession for Phillips (pp.123ff) expresses an acceptance that what is of value cannot be destroyed by the way things go, together with a wish that the other person might come to see things in the same way too (ibid., p.124). He is aware that prayer also presupposes both a praying community and the meaning that prayer has for that community. Furthermore, he believes that when believers pray for the world the power of God manifests itself in and through their love for God. The witness of believers to their love of God is the only power which brings men and women to God (ibid., p.128).

Whether all this stands up as a convincing exposition of the nature of prayer is open to discussion. Certainly, Phillips is one of the main exponents of the view that petitionary and intercessory prayer can amount to no more than 'Thy will be done'. However, not only is such a view of prayer theologically and philosophically unnecessary, as will be shown, it is hoped, in the course of this book, but it is also doubtful that it is sufficiently religiously satisfying to believers who want their prayer to change more than merely themselves. Of course, all prayer will include an element of therapeutic meditation. Indeed, in reply to an issue presented earlier, rather than changing God's mind, the point of persistence in prayer may well be to change our minds so that we have a deeper understanding of what God's will is for the situation we are praying for. Nevertheless, although the restriction of petitionary and intercessory prayer to therapeutic meditation is an inadequate view of its nature, Phillips has raised many of the issues that will have to be grappled with in any account of this kind of prayer.

The third and last of these brief surveys of contributions to the debate about prayer concerns those that are theological in nature. That of John Burnaby (1962, pp.219ff), for instance, is an exposition of the ethicized view of petitionary and intercessory prayer as seeking conformity with the will of God, together with a presentation of God's action in the world in terms of the theory of double agency (which will be dealt with in due course). An earlier contribution is that of P.T. Forsyth (1949) who, like many other theologians, sees a major impact of prayer as working changes in those who pray and thereby seek to align themselves with the will of God. For Forsyth, prayer is an educative process in which human beings learn cooperation with God. But he also sees prayer as more than this. It is also God's work in us. Forsyth is prepared to admit that prayer may change the will of God or, rather, seeing that God's ways may in fact be extremely flexible, the intention of God.

Without doubt, however, among the more important modern contributions to our understanding of prayer is that of Peter Baelz (1968, 1982). In *Does God Answer Prayer?* Baelz (1982) expounds his view that prayer is part and parcel of our relationship with God, which implies that asking can no longer be the be-all and end-all of prayer. A further consequence of prayer seen as a way of being and sharing with God is that magical attempts to 'use' or manipulate God for our own ends are ruled out. The fundamental question is the kind of God we believe in. Baelz believes that we need to get our ideas about God straight before we can speak about prayer. This may be a view that needs to be qualified by the sort of remarks made earlier concerning the mutual interaction of ideas about God and the experience of prayer.

It is not really possible to do justice to Baelz' *Prayer and Providence* in a short space. In fact, this book appears to have more to say about providence than about prayer. Nevertheless, according to Baelz, the notion of asking God suggests that God may act in some specific way in answer to human prayer and that this activity may cause something to happen in the world which might not otherwise have happened (Baelz, 1968, p.58). This leads, in Baelz' third and fourth chapters, to a discussion of what is meant by God's activity and how we might identify it.

It is in his fifth chapter that Baelz comes to the heart of his exposition of prayer, which is presented in an eschatological framework. Prayer is an anticipation of the *parousia*; it looks forward to what God has still to do in and through those who respond to the divine love (ibid., pp.97–101). Petition and intercession are related to the element of the unfulfilled in the purpose of God for the world. It is a form of participation in the divine ministry of reconciliation and a contribution towards the completion of that work. Such prayer may also be said to be at the centre of Christian communion with God because in it divine providence and human faith come together. But prayer is no substitute for work, since communion with God must include cooperation with God, of which petition and intercession are but one aspect (ibid., p.108).

Baelz, in common with many others, is clear that we may expect prayer to make a difference to the one who prays (ibid., p.110). He also supports the 'double agency' theory of God's action when he says that God's activity in the world is mediated through human agents, thus making it an indirect rather than a direct activity. He further believes that, although it is open to objections, a case can be made for God's direct action in response to prayer. Of course, there can be no question of prayer either informing God or persuading God. Nevertheless, the scientific view of the world has room for the free exercise of human will, so why not also for God working within the natural order without disrupting it? But this raises the issue as to what may count as an answer to prayer. The refusal of a prayer by God might result in the growth of religious awareness and in personal relationship with God, and this is in itself valuable. But can we say more than this when what is asked for is granted? The instrumentality of prayer is not merely mechanical; rather the occurrence which is interpreted as an answer to prayer has to be seen in the context of the all-embracing personal relationship between God

and the person who prays. The ground of the conviction that God does answer prayer in this way lies in what the believer holds to be the character of God and the relation of God to the world, the norm of which, for the Christian, is insights associated with the person of Christ. However, it may be better, rather than think of God's doing something in response to prayer, to consider that our asking in faith may make it possible for God to do something which could not have been done without our asking (ibid., pp.115–6).

Initial Conclusions

Already the issues that need to be addressed are becoming clear, and they will be dealt with, to a lesser or greater degree, in the chapters that follow. One issue is the whole question of analogy – its need, its limits and its dangers – in its application to the relationship of human beings with God, and particularly to the expression of that relationship through prayer. The position to be defended in this book is that the relationship is a personal one between human persons and God who is also understood in personal terms. In such a context, the growth of those who pray in their relationship to God is of vital importance when it comes to understanding not only the need to ask God but also how God may respond.

The question whether prayer results in God doing in response what might not have been done (or not done in the same way or time) if the prayer had not been offered is one that will be given an affirmative answer. But the prior question as to what might count as an answer to prayer is also important, and raises the issue whether prayer has an effect only on the person who prays, resulting in that person understanding the will of God more clearly, becoming more closely aligned with that will and more deeply committed to carrying it out. An argument against such reductionist views will be put forward. However, to argue in such a way also requires an investigation of the concept of divine providence and reasons for identifying certain events as God's action.

Finally this introductory survey has also brought to the surface questions about the way in which the classical divine attributes of omniscience, omnipotence and impassibility, as traditionally understood, may raise problems for both the understanding and the practice of petitionary and intercessory prayer. These issues, too, will be dealt with in the chapters that follow. But first part of the biblical tradition will be examined to see if and how it provides clues towards resolving some of these questions.

Notes

1 Cullmann (1995) fits into this perceived tendency to be little more than descriptive in approach, but a recent notable exception to this judgment is Miller (1994). Goldsworthy (2003), from a Conservative Evangelical/Reformed perspective, also examines prayer in the light of a biblical–theological approach.

2 Miller (1994), Watts (2001) and Goldsworthy (2003) are worthy of note in this connection.

3 For example, Fiddes (2000, ch.4), Polkinghorne (2001).

4 This paper can also be found on the Internet at http://bmjjournals.com/cgi/content/323/7327/1450. Letters in response to the paper are posted at http://bmjjournals.com/cgi/content/324/7344/1037. Among other scientific studies of the efficacy of prayer are those by Byrd (1988), Koenig *et al*. (1998), Harris *et al*. (1999) and Kwang *et al.* (2001). A large study of prayer and healing is currently being carried out by Dr Herbert Benson at the Mind/Body Medical Institute which is affiliated to Harvard. The results of this study have not yet been made public. For a summary of current research and an assessment of its results, see http://www.pastornet.net.au/jmm/spir/spir0019.htm.

5 Most of the main references can be found in Koenig *et al*. (2001).

6 See below, pp.41–2.

Chapter 2

What does the New Testament Teach us about Prayer?

There is a large variety of teaching on the subject of prayer in both Old and New Testaments, but it is difficult to derive a single, unified theology of prayer from it. Perhaps that is the reason why some studies of biblical prayer concentrate on the function of prayer rather than its content.[1] We shall select only a few strands from the large amount of material available. The greatest amount of attention will be devoted to the Lukan material, in view of the emphasis, in both the Gospel and the Acts, on prayer. It is well known that Luke also couples this with an interest in the work of the Holy Spirit. A discussion of Luke's sources for his presentation of Jesus as an intercessor will also be required, and for that we shall need to examine the concept of Christ's heavenly intercession in the context of Jewish ideas concerning heavenly intercessors. This will be followed by a critical examination of the exhaustive study of Jesus as intercessor by David Crump (1992). After this the chapter will continue with a short review of the Pauline material and conclude with a survey of the biblical language about Spirit in order to develop one possible biblical model of prayer.[2]

The Lukan Material on Prayer

In his extended introduction to the Gospel, Joseph A. Fitzmyer includes a section on Luke and prayer (Fitzmyer, 1981, pp.244–7). He supports the frequent observation that Luke portrays Jesus at prayer more often than in any of the other Gospels, and that in his account of the life of the early Church in the Acts of the Apostles Luke makes further references to prayer. In fact, Luke's whole account of the origins of Christianity begins in the context of the prayer life of the Jewish community (Luke 1:10, 1:13, 2:36–8). Furthermore, it is only Luke who tells us that John the Baptist used to teach his disciples how to pray (Luke 11:1; see also 5:33). Above all Luke shows that Jesus prayed at the major critical turning points in his ministry (Luke 3:12, 6:12, 9:18, 9:28, 11:2, 22:32, 22:41, 23:46), and on occasion even tells us how Jesus prayed (Luke 10:21–3, 22:42, 23:46). He also portrays the disciples as asking Jesus to teach them how to pray (Luke 11:1–4). The Lukan Jesus also gives teaching about prayer, mainly in the section following the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:5–8, 9–13; see also 10:2) and in the parable of the judge and the widow (Luke 18:1ff).

In the Acts of the Apostles prayer appears as part of the life of the early Christians even before Pentecost (Acts 1:14), and after Pentecost Peter and John still go up to the Temple to pray, thus continuing to associate themselves with the prayer life of Israel. Prayer is mentioned as a feature of the infant community in Acts 2:42; an example of Christian prayer is given in Acts 4:24ff; and in Acts 6:4 prayer is regarded as being as important as the ministry of the word. Again, in the story of Peter and Cornelius, Peter's vision is given in the context of prayer (Acts 10:9, 30; 11:5).

Just as significant moments in the life of Jesus occurred in the context of prayer, so also did important events in the life of the early community: the choice of a successor for Judas (Acts 1:24); the appointment of the seven (Acts 6:6); the release of Peter from prison (Acts 12:5); the commissioning of Barnabas and Saul (Acts 13:3); and their appointment of elders in every Church (Acts 14:23). Luke also gives an important place to prayer in the life of Paul: of particular note are his initiation into the Christian life (Acts 9:11) and his departure from Miletus (Acts 20:36; see also 21:5). Fitzmyer justly sums up the place given to prayer in Luke–Acts by saying: 'What begins in [Luke's] account as a manifestation of Temple piety is made into a characteristic of the Christian life – dependence on God and his Anointed, manifested now on both a common and individual basis as a mode of communing with them' (ibid., p.247).

From Luke's emphasis on prayer we turn now to his concern with the Spirit. In the Gospel there are three times more references to the Spirit than in Mark. In Acts 1–12 alone there are 37 occurrences.[3] Luke seems to mention the Spirit mostly at the beginning of certain stages in his account. There are seven references in the infancy narrative, six in Chapters 3–4, and four in Chapters 10–12, although after this the Spirit never again appears in the Gospel. It is also noteworthy that the Spirit figures often in the early part (Chapters 1–16) of Acts and then only occasionally (about 12 times in all) from Chapter 17 onwards. Fitzmyer comments: 'What seems … to be important for Luke is that various stages of his narrative be initiated under the influence of the Spirit' (ibid., p.228).

From these references a number of themes important for our purposes can be distilled. The first of these is that Jesus is portrayed from the very first as a possessor of the Spirit and not just as the Spirit's object. Hence, according to E. Schweizer (1968), after the resurrection he becomes the one who dispenses the Spirit to the community. Schweizer also notes that Luke sees each of the various stages of Jesus' ministry beginning under the influence of the Spirit.[4] In addition, he suggests that the emendation of the Matthaean 'good things' (*agatha*) to 'Holy Spirit' in Luke 11:13 is understandable since Luke does not wish his readers to interpret *agatha* simply in terms of earthly goods (ibid., pp.409–10).[5] For Luke, the Spirit is the supreme gift which the believer receives in the community of Jesus. That each baptized Christian possesses the Spirit is presupposed in Acts 19:2. The Spirit is given, and permanently given, to all members of the community. In other words, endowment with the Spirit is regarded as a natural consequence of coming to faith (Acts 8:16ff, 9:17, 10:44, 11:16f, 19:6).

In all this Luke has gone significantly further than Mark and Matthew, whose concern is with individual instances of the Spirit's manifestation. Although Luke adopts the typically Jewish idea that the Spirit is the spirit of prophecy (Schweizer, 1968, p.407),[6] his concern is with the time of the Church. According to Schweizer, so far as Luke is concerned, Christian prophets are no longer isolated individuals because all members of the eschatological community are prophets. The community is a prophetic community and the promises of God are fulfilled by the people of God to whom the Spirit is given in totality (ibid., p.412). However, Luke still remains within the orbit of Jewish thought: 'Fundamentally, [Luke] does not cease to regard the Spirit merely as the extraordinary power which makes possible unusual acts of power.' Thus, according to Luke, the Spirit gives only the power which enables the believer to discharge a special task. The difference between this view of the Spirit and that of the Old Testament is simply that in the new age of salvation all members of the community rather than special individuals are bearers of the Spirit (ibid.).

We turn now to the relation between prayer and the Spirit in Luke–Acts. Schweizer thinks that, as a preparation for the reception of the Spirit, prayer is far more important in Luke's eyes than baptism. Although the point may well be debated, in Acts baptism is not seen as an essential means of obtaining the Spirit (ibid., p.414). Rather, the Spirit is given while Christians pray in Acts 1:14, 2:1ff, 8:15–17 and 13:1–3 as well as in 4:23–31. The same point emerges in the story of Jesus' baptism. Fitzmyer (1981, p.481) notes: 'The only distinctive Lucan element in the baptismal narrative (Luke 3:21–2) is the notice that the heavenly identification of Jesus took place while he was at prayer.' On the same passage, C.F. Evans comments that, as with the voice from heaven, so also the descent of the Spirit does not coincide with Jesus' emergence from the waters of baptism, as in both Mark and Matthew, but with his subsequent prayer. This is due to Luke's interest in Jesus as a person of prayer, who prays at critical moments (Evans, 1990, p.247).

As we shall shortly see, the relationship between prayer, baptism and the bestowal of the Spirit is more complex than the last paragraph suggests. Nevertheless we are already beginning to discern the connections. For instance, the idea that Luke regards prayer as the means by which God guides the course of salvation history is one that has found wide acceptance by modern NT scholarship. One of the early exponents of this view was Stephen S. Smalley (1973, pp.59–71), who repeats the point that prayer is a matter of great concern to the author of Luke–Acts and shows that in this work prayer is related closely to significant moments in the *Heilsgeschichte*. Smalley's understanding of Luke–Acts is that it is by prayer that God guides the course of redemption history through its various stages. Thus prayer in Luke–Acts serves to underline critical moments in the unfolding of redemptive history rather than appear as an aspect of piety or as a didactic comment upon it. Smalley also notes that throughout Luke–Acts prayer is connected at those moments with the Spirit, and he sums up his argument by saying, 'Luke naturally regards the gift of the Spirit as "God's principal answer to human prayer"' (ibid., p.62).

But, as suggested above, the matter is possibly more complex and less neat than Smalley would have it. For Luke the link between prayer and the bestowal of the Spirit is far from an exclusive one. It would be more accurate to say that Luke binds up the gift of the Spirit with prayer, baptism and the laying on of hands into a single package in which far and away the most important element is the bestowal of the Spirit. Which of the other elements in the package is most closely linked with the giving of the Spirit varies with the particular occasion. It might be baptism (Acts 2:38), the laying on of hands with prayer (Acts 8:15–17), baptism and the laying on of hands (Acts 19:5–6), or just prayer (Acts 4:31). Smalley is thus somewhat overenthusiastic in stating his case. This enthusiasm leads him into finding the presence of the Spirit implied in passages where only prayer is mentioned: for example, the transfiguration. With the exception of Luke 10:21–2 and the sayings at 11:13 and 12:10–12, the Spirit is virtually absent in the Lukan account of the ministry of Jesus. On the other hand, we should note that Luke 6:12 refers to an all-night vigil of prayer before Jesus appointed the Twelve and that Acts 1:12 says that Jesus chose the Apostles ‘through the Holy Spirit’. There is, therefore, some case for saying that Luke ties up prayer with the eschatological gift of the Spirit, although it is not an exclusive one. Thus the comment by Evans on Luke 11:13 remains valid:

> The section on prayer is concluded, and the objects of the petitions of the Lord’s Prayer, and of prayer in general, are summed up, by placing on the lips of Jesus a promise of the gift which in Acts is the characteristic possession of the Christian and which is given in answer to prayer. (Evans, 1990, p.487)

David Crump, however, disagrees with this widely held view that Luke sees prayer as the means by which God *guides* salvation history. He points out that not all of Luke’s references to Jesus at prayer are connected with significant turning points in the *Heilsgeschichte*. There is nothing ‘critical’, for instance, about the situation recorded in Luke 5:16 which is no more than a general remark concerning Jesus’ habit of withdrawing for prayer. Crump suggests that it would be more accurate to say that, according to Luke, prayer is the means by which the ways God is already guiding salvation history are *revealed*, so that prayer becomes a means of perceiving and participating in what God is doing (Crump, 1992, p.6). However, this is only a part of the way in which Luke understands the meaning of prayer. It is Crump’s thesis, which we shall examine in greater detail later on in the course of this chapter, that Luke’s principal concern in his portrait of the praying Jesus is not so much to present him as a model of piety for disciples to follow, although this aspect is not altogether absent from Luke’s account, but rather to bring out the Christological significance of Jesus’ prayer life. There are points of dissimilarity as well as similarity between the prayer of Jesus and that of disciples, because in some respects Jesus’ prayers are unique. According to Crump, Luke presents Jesus as the Chosen One of God, the final eschatological praying Prophet who, through his prayers on earth, oversees the revelation of the Father and especially the revelation of his own Messiahship/Sonship, extends

God's call to those he has chosen and heals their spiritual blindness, experiences God's guidance and the Spirit's power for his own ministry, and ensures the perseverance of his disciples through various trials. Furthermore, for Luke this earthly prayer ministry of Jesus is preparatory to his exercising a similar role as the heavenly intercessor (ibid., p.14). Crump believes that the originality of Luke's presentation of the praying Jesus lies in the way he develops some already established traditions and adds to them his own insights. This means that, before we consider in more detail the Lukan material, and Crump's understanding of it, we must examine the concept of the heavenly intercession of Christ and how such a belief arose.

The Heavenly Intercession of Jesus

Despite the paucity of references in the New Testament, C.H. Dodd says of the heavenly intercession of Jesus that it was 'an idea that was deeply fixed in early Christian belief' (Dodd, 1959, p.158). It is found in the Letter to the Hebrews (7:25, 9:24), in Paul's letter to the Romans (8:34) and in the Johannine literature at 1 John 2:1. Additionally, there is the concept of the *paraclete* in the Johannine writings. We must also take Acts 7:56 into account where Stephen sees the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

Many interpreters see this heavenly intercession of Jesus as a continuation and development of Jesus' earthly intercession to which the Gospels testify (Bruce, 1965b, p.liii; Guthrie, 1983, p.167). Thus, concerning Luke 22:32, in which Jesus tells Simon that he has prayed for him, Bruce, commenting on Hebrews 7:25, says: 'If it be asked what form this heavenly intercession takes, what better answer can be given than that He still does for his people at the right hand of God what he did for Peter on earth?' (Bruce, 1965b, pp.154f).

Again, there is the saying in Luke 12:8–9 about the acknowledgment before God of those who acknowledge Jesus before others. Dodd considers that it is this text in the Gospel which lies behind Romans 8:34 (Dodd, 1959, p.158). Moreover, it also implies that the Gospels do not view Christ's intercessory activity as being confined to his earthly phase (Bruce, 1965b, p.liii). Guthrie comments: '[The] heavenly ministry of Christ shows his present activity for his people and is a direct continuation of his earthly ministry' (Guthrie, 1983, p.167). However, against this unanimity among other scholars, Crump insists that it is not that Luke presents Jesus in the Gospel as a heavenly Intercessor-Designate, but rather that Luke portrays him as being already the heavenly Intercessor who prays on earth as he now prays in heaven (Crump, 1992, pp.154ff; also p.241). We shall return to a consideration of Crump's view in due course, but first we must give some attention to the way in which the doctrine of Christ's heavenly intercession developed.

Several interpreters attribute the development of such a doctrine to an exegesis of Isaiah 53:12 coupled with Psalm 110 (for example, Bruce, 1963, p.180). Hebrews starts from the second of these two texts and from it develops an extended interpretation of the heavenly priesthood of Jesus in terms of Melchizedek.

Käsemann also believes that Romans 8:34 is a development of traditional beliefs. He writes:

> he who died for us is now the risen Lord who according to the interpretation of messianic prophecy current in primitive Christianity sits as the exalted One at the right hand of God. He can thus be our constant Intercessor like the High Priest of Heb. 7:25 or the Paraclete of 1 John 2:1 ... warding off even future accusations against us. (Käsemann, 1980, p.248)

Barnabas Lindars thinks that the idea of the intercession of Jesus in Hebrews 7:25 alludes to Isaiah 53:12 in the original Hebrew rather than the Septuagint which is the usual source of Old Testament quotations in Hebrews (Lindars, 1991, p.36, n.13). If this is the case, then Hebrews has derived the notion of Christ's heavenly intercession from traditional usage, because the Hebrew text of the Old Testament was not apparently directly available to him (ibid., p.53). In this, he gives support to Bruce in his assertion that the notion of Christ's heavenly intercession in Hebrews 7:25 is, like Romans 8:34, 'an echo of an early Christian confession of faith which in addition to acknowledging the death, resurrection and enthronement of Christ made mention also of His intercessory ministry' (Bruce, 1965b, p.154). The link between Hebrews 7:25 and Romans 8:34 (as well as Romans 8:27) is further established by the use of the verb *entynchanein* in both texts, whereas it does not appear elsewhere in Hebrews (Guthrie, 1983, p.167).

A different approach is that provided by H.W. Attridge, who believes that the portrait in Hebrews of Jesus as High Priest is derived from Christian tradition based on a complex Jewish heritage (Attridge, 1989, pp.97ff). He claims that in Jewish sources intercession was primarily a function of the priest, although many other types of individuals could intercede before God (Attridge, 1989, p.211). But Attridge denies that the two major characteristics of Jesus as High Priest in Hebrews (his heavenly intercession and his self-sacrifice) can be found in connection with eschatological Jewish expectations of a priestly Messiah (ibid., p.99). Instead, he derives the Christian concept of Jesus as heavenly priest from beliefs concerning angelic priests, traces of which can be seen in the Old Testament (Job 5:1, 33:23; Zechariah 1:12, 3:1–10), but which are more prominent in the intertestamental apocalyptic literature (ibid., pp.99f).[7] This tradition of angels functioning as intercessory priests is not restricted to apocalyptic texts but is also found in Philo. However, while certain attributes of the Logos/High Priest in Philo are similar to those of Christ in Hebrews, nevertheless in Hebrews the motif of the high-priesthood of Christ is not connected within his cosmic functions. Philo, therefore, cannot be a major source from which Hebrews derives the notion of Christ's heavenly intercession.

Attridge agrees with the other interpreters of Hebrews mentioned above that the author was not entirely original in his development of the model of Christ as High Priest. In the other New Testament texts already cited two major high-priestly functions, intercession and self-sacrifice, are attributed to Jesus. Attridge comments:

> It is possible that our author was inspired by one or both of these priestly *functions* traditionally ascribed to Christ to apply the *title* High Priest to Jesus . . . It is probable . . . that the image of Christ as a heavenly High Priest was traditional within the early Christian community addressed by Hebrews. The function of Jesus in this role would have been understood on analogy with the priestly angels of Jewish tradition to provide intercession for human beings before Yahweh. (Ibid., p.102)

Attridge does not find alternative explanations of the source of Hebrews' high-priestly Christology convincing. He thinks that there is little justification for attributing a priestly consciousness to Jesus, or for seeing a priestly Christology in the Synoptic tradition as a whole. He also denies that a priestly Christology is a dominant element in the Johannine picture of Christ. The Fourth Gospel nowhere explicitly identifies Christ as priest. At most, it can only point to some of the traditions that lie behind Hebrews. Furthermore, according to Attridge, although Hebrews may reflect certain ideas derived from passages about the suffering servant, it does not explicitly mention any servant passage as it elaborates the concept of Christ's self-sacrifice. Nowhere in early Christian references to the servant texts is the servant explicitly described as a priest. Attridge concludes, therefore, that the traditional high-priest title and the image of the high priest as heavenly intercessor are not drawn from the complex of servant passages. Rather they are based, he thinks, on Jewish notions of priestly angels and were already a part of the Christian liturgical and exegetical tradition on which Hebrews draws.

Yet another view is provided by Crump. He examines ancient Judaism for examples of exalted human intercessors who, having been effective intercessors on earth, continue their ministry in heaven (Crump, 1992, pp.204ff). He finds that those identified as powerful intercessors in the Old Testament were not so designated because they fulfilled a special role or office, such as prophet, priest or king, but because they were especially chosen by God. Their intercession was primarily concerned with God's judgment in relation to Israel's failure. Neither did the Old Testament expand human intercession to include heavenly intercession. There are no OT examples of exalted human beings praying for Israel in heaven (ibid., p.209). Instead, as we have already noted, the Old Testament gives that role to angels. However, in later Judaism exalted human figures do begin to appear as heavenly intercessors. Supreme among such figures is Enoch, although Moses and others such as Abraham are also mentioned. Crump concludes that in ancient Judaism the exalted human heavenly intercessors are specially chosen for this task, and that this choice is particularly associated with their piety and powerful earthly prayer life, so that what they do in heaven is simply a continuation of what they did so effectively on earth. Crump believes that Luke's portrait of Jesus as heavenly Intercessor already interceding on earth has been developed out of a combination of these Jewish traditions with the other traditions about the heavenly intercession of Jesus. These are reflected in Romans 8:34, Hebrews 7:25 and 1 John 2:1, and are based on his ascension and exaltation in language reminiscent of Psalm 110 (ibid., p.233). All this suggests that the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, while remaining one of the most important witnesses to the heavenly

intercession of Christ in the New Testament, was not in this respect a complete innovator.

In Hebrews, the heavenly intercession of the exalted Jesus is an aspect of his high-priestly ministry. Christ functions as an effective intercessor because of his human experience (2:18, 5:7), but also because he is 'seated at the right hand' and so shares in the divine life. In this respect, Attridge suggests that, although the thought of Hebrews is not rooted in the same metaphysical foundation as patristic two-nature Christology, even so the way the Fathers based Christ's intercessory ministry upon the combination of his humanity and divinity does 'capture something of the dynamics of the text's imagery' (Attridge, 1989, p.211). He adds that the Letter to the Hebrews does not develop 'a theoretical foundation for a doctrine of intercession'. Its purpose, rather, is to offer assurance to its readers that the intercessory role traditionally ascribed to Christ is indeed effective. It was in the post-Reformation period that Christ's heavenly intercession came to be understood as an extension or application of his atoning suffering. But more recent interpreters often assume an intimate connection between sacrifice and intercession, and Christ's intercessory activity is seen to be directed towards the forgiveness of sins (ibid., pp.211f). Lindars, for instance, reflects this assumption when he writes that the 'crucial question of Hebrews is whether the sacrificial death of Jesus has lasting efficacy so as to deal with sins now' (Lindars, 1991, p.36). Lindars also says that Hebrews, by working through the differences between the Levitical priesthood and Christ's priesthood, 'shows how the better sacrifice of Christ is actually effective in the present ... the application to the present is maintained by the timeless statement that Jesus "always lives to make intercession for us"' (ibid., p.79). He adds, 'the wound of the consciousness of sin is healed, because the soul's access to God is found to be unbroken. Our great high priest knows our weaknesses (4:15) and always lives to make intercession for us (7:25)' (ibid., pp.105f).

However, while admitting that first-century ideas concerning heavenly intercession could include expiatory activity, Attridge thinks that help in time of trial is also in view in Hebrews. This, of course, is also the context of Romans 8:34. Meanwhile, Crump believes that Hebrews presents a view of Christ's intercession whereby he continues to do in heaven what he has already done regularly on earth. Hebrews 5:7–10 shows that Jesus' earthly testing and struggles in prayer contribute to his ministry of intercession in heaven (Crump, 1992, p.18).

We now proceed to a consideration of the contribution of the Johannine literature and the first text we must examine is 1 John 2:1. The thought of this verse, which Dodd describes as 'no innovation' (Dodd, 1946, p.24), shares not only the same thought world as Hebrews 7:25 and Romans 8:34 but also, significantly, uses the term *paraklētos*, thus linking it with the farewell discourses of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel. Another link with the thought of Hebrews is that in 1 John also the heavenly intercession of Christ is coupled with the forgiveness of sins. However, the image in 1 John has become one of a trial before God's court. As the one who died for us Christ is our advocate at the bar of heaven. He lives to intercede for us.

Behm (1967, pp.800–814) finds that, although the Old Testament bears witness to human intercessors who address Yahweh on behalf of those under their protection,[8] nevertheless superhuman, angelic intercessors, in both the Old Testament and the intertestamental literature, are the most immediate antecedents of the concept of the *paraclete*:

> Judaism is proud of being able to look back on a long history in which righteous men and prophets stood at the side of the fathers in advocacy before God . . . Even stronger, however, is the sense that the people and pious individuals need and have superhuman, heavenly helpers: the blessed righteous and, especially, angels . . . The true office of the interceding angel, who does not merely mediate human prayers to God but is the advocate of the community and its members before God's judgement throne, rests in the hands of supreme angels, especially Michael. (Ibid., p.810)

Behm thus finds strong support for the supposition that there is a 'historico-religious connection between the concept of advocacy in the Old Testament and the concept of the *paraclete* in the New Testament' (ibid., p.812).

This, then, is the background to 1 John 2:1, where Jesus Christ is called a *paraclete* of sinful Christians before the Father. The dominant idea in the text is that of the heavenly court before which sinners are brought for trial and where they need an advocate (ibid., p.811). By contrast, it is mainly the Spirit who is called the *paraclete* in the Fourth Gospel. Nevertheless, Behm believes that the apparent cleavage between the Gospel and 1 John is overcome by the fact that 'the varying statements that the office of advocacy is exercised both in the court of heaven and also among men on earth are common to the Old Testament and Jewish sources and to the New Testament material' (ibid., p.812). Jesus also speaks of himself in John 16:26 as one who could (but actually does not in this instance) ask the Father on behalf of the disciples, although the Gospel does not use the word *paraklētos* of Jesus in this saying. However, that Jesus is also a *paraclete* is implied in John 14:16 where he speaks of an *allos paraklētos* who will be given by the Father at the Son's request (Barrett, 1967, p.385).

The Johannine literature thus expresses the same thought as was found in Hebrews 7:25 and Romans 8:34, even though the word *paraklētos* does not occur in the non-Johannine writings. The Johannine use of the term *paraclete* arises from a similar Jewish background to the concept of Christ's heavenly intercession in these other texts. Primitive Christianity recognized only one advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, who as the Righteous One can intercede for sinners. Behm also cites Matthew 10:32 (paralleled in Luke 12:8f) and comments that, since in this saying Jesus sees himself as the defender of those who confess him at the judgment seat of the Father, the Christian concept of a transcendent eschatological *paraclete* goes back to Jesus himself (Behm, 1967, p.812).

This brings us to a consideration of the heavenly intercessor in Acts 7:55–6. Crump observes that this is the only place outside the Gospels where Jesus is called the Son of Man, and that this text is also unique in that it describes Jesus as *standing* on the right hand of God (Crump, 1992, p.178). Several explanations

of the standing posture have been offered. Ernst Haenchen mentions three: Jesus stood to welcome Stephen to heaven; Jesus is standing because he is about to enter upon his Messianic reign on earth, so that Stephen's vision anticipates the *parousia*; and the Son of Man of Daniel 7:13 was thought to stand like the angels in God's presence (Haenchen, 1971, p.292, n.4). Bruce adds that the significance of the standing posture is also that it presents Jesus as a witness before the heavenly court to the martyrdom of Stephen in accordance with Luke 12:8. He writes, 'Stephen has been confessing Christ before men, and now he sees Christ confessing His servant before God' (Bruce, 1965a, p.168). Crump also prefers this explanation (Crump, 1992, pp.191ff). A standing posture also fits the role of an advocate who intercedes. It contrasts with the sitting posture of the exalted Christ in Hebrews where the emphasis is on the finality of Christ's work.

Crump interprets Acts 7:55–6, not in terms of a heavenly High Priest theology as in Hebrews, but rather in terms of a development of what he sees as Luke's presentation of Jesus as the interceding eschatological Prophet. He points to a number of texts in the Gospel, such as Luke 11:30ff, where he sees prophetic significance being given to the title 'Son of Man'. Moreover, in Luke 12:8, Jesus describes his role as heavenly advocate as the work of the Son of Man, and in Acts 7:56 it is as Son of Man that Jesus is at the right hand of God. Crump asserts that in the Gospel Luke shows how Jesus, while pursuing his ministry as final Prophet, was also a great man of prayer. Acts 7:55–6, therefore, shows how Jesus continues his ministry of intercession in heaven (ibid., p.199).[9]

How far, then, do these varying presentations of Jesus as heavenly intercessor provide models for human intercession? Firstly, the question of antecedents is important in deciding whether or not the heavenly intercession of Christ does provide such a model. If those antecedents are indeed Jewish notions of interceding angels, it would appear difficult to find a model for human intercession in the New Testament witness to the heavenly intercession of Christ. On the other hand, if the model is that of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53:12 it might be claimed that, since the servant exhibits a pattern of ministry which was fulfilled in the person of Jesus but which a number of other individuals and groups could also partially exemplify, there is a continuity between the heavenly intercession of Jesus and human intercession on earth. However, although some interpreters do find clear links between Isaiah 53:12 and the texts in Hebrews and Romans, the application in those texts is made in terms of the interpretation of Messianic prophecy current in early Christianity. There is no hint that the concept of the Servant might also apply to believers as it did, supremely, to Jesus Christ. The conclusion to be drawn is that, even if Isaiah 53 is a model for the heavenly intercession of Christ, this latter is nevertheless unable to provide a model for human intercession.

Crump's view that exalted human intercessors are also part of the background to the Lukan portrait of Jesus as intercessor might initially appear to suggest continuity between the intercession of Jesus and human intercession. As we shall see later, however, Crump believes that there are dissimilarities as well as similarities between the prayer life of Jesus and our prayer life. It would be

difficult to claim that the heavenly intercession of Jesus is one of the places where the similarities are to the fore. Furthermore, the heavenly intercession of Jesus in Hebrews 7:25 and 1 John 2:1 is mainly, though not exclusively, directed to the forgiveness of sins. Since this depends on Christ's atoning work in both texts, this intercession could hardly provide a model for human intercession.

We shall be giving further consideration to the continuity between the intercession of the earthly Jesus and that of the exalted Lord. However, we have already seen that there are examples in Luke's Gospel that point to Jesus in his role as heavenly advocate. For instance, the saying of Luke 22:32 has as its context a contest at the bar of heaven with Jesus acting as advocate for the defence against Satan the accuser. In this text, therefore, as well as in Luke 12:8–9, Jesus appears in his role as heavenly intercessor, and it is a role that only he can perform. In the face of the evidence, therefore, we must conclude that it is doubtful that the heavenly intercession of Jesus can provide a model for human intercession. If we are to look to Jesus for such a model, it might possibly be found not in his heavenly intercession but rather in those texts which present him as an intercessor during his ministry on earth. It is therefore to a consideration of those texts that we must now turn.

Jesus as Intercessor in the Gospel of Luke

We have already noted David Crump's conclusion that Luke's portrait of Jesus as a man of prayer is governed as much, if not more so, by the Christological concern to present Jesus as the final, eschatological, praying Prophet as by the desire to present him as a paradigmatic model of piety. There are several aspects of the prayer of Jesus that Crump identifies as contributing to this Lukan presentation of the intercessory work of Jesus. Prayer is connected with the self-revelation of Jesus, with the experience of Jesus, with the process of spiritual illumination, with the nature of Jesus' messianic mission and with Jesus as the heavenly intercessor already praying on earth.

Concerning prayer and the self-revelation of Jesus, Crump begins with Luke 9:18. He points out that here Jesus' prayer is not associated with his teaching about suffering but rather with Peter's Christological confession. It is that confession which elicits the teaching on the necessity of suffering, rather than the prayer itself. There is, therefore, no question of prayer in this passage being associated with a decisive turning point in the *Heilsgeschichte*. Rather the prayer concerns the disciple's understanding of Jesus' Messiahship, not Jesus' own self-understanding (Crump, 1992, p.24). A similar point emerges from a consideration of the story of the transfiguration in Luke 9:28–36, where the importance of prayer is underlined by being mentioned twice. Crump believes that the transfiguration was not new revelation for Jesus but rather encouragement to persevere on the path of suffering that has already been shown to him. The prayer of Jesus on this occasion was therefore a means of Jesus' communion with the Father through which he received divine encouragement and confirmation of his mission. Crump

also makes much of the fact that Luke does not stipulate the content of Jesus' prayer on this occasion, thus suggesting that it gave God the opportunity to answer in ways that had not been specifically requested but which the Father deemed appropriate (that is, by transfiguring Jesus), and so putting into effect an unexpected element of the divine will.[10] In addition to this, however, is the possibility that the prayer of Jesus at the transfiguration was also the means of the accompanying revelation to the disciples: 'As in Peter's confession, Jesus prays, and those who are with him receive new insight into who he really is' (ibid., p.48).

Crump next examines Luke 10:21–4, where he thinks it probable that Luke represents Jesus thanking God for hearing the prayers which he offered on behalf of his disciples in 9:18 and perhaps also 9:28ff. In this prayer Jesus expresses gratitude for the spiritual insight that has been granted to the disciples in response to his prayers. In this particular prayer, Jesus also appears as the sole mediator of the knowledge of the Father. We must first know Jesus if we are to know God. But the true knowledge of Jesus as the Son is under the control of the Father and is revealed only to those who are chosen. Crump asserts that Jesus' prayers have played a crucial role in this process. Jesus' task as the mediator of God's revelation is discharged by means of his efficacy as one who prays. The conclusion drawn is that Jesus' status as an interceding mediator was already operative during his earthly ministry and was not a new status bestowed on him after the ascension. The basis of Jesus' work as intercessor does not lie in his exaltation, but in his 'antecedent filial relationship' with the Father. For Luke, Jesus is not merely an 'intercessor-designate' whose subsequent ministry in heaven will depend upon the completion of a prior task on earth. The ground of his intercessory ministry, whether on earth or in heaven, is his status as Son (ibid., pp.74f).

From Jesus' prayers mediating the revelation of his Messiahship we turn to the relation of prayer to the experience of Jesus. We begin with the account of the baptism of Jesus in Luke 3:21–2. Crump understands this story as an illustration of what God does when Jesus prays (the heavens open, the Spirit descends, a voice comes from heaven) rather than merely as an account of the baptism itself. Crump comments: 'Luke's version of the baptism has done more than simply introduce prayer into a significant "point" in Jesus' life; it has forged a direct relationship between the act of prayer and the following events, for it was "while Jesus was praying that"' (ibid., p.110).

Nevertheless we must be careful in drawing general conclusions from this passage. Many references to Jesus praying in Luke, including this one, do not mention the content of Jesus' prayer. Crump, in fact, believes that the specifics of prayer are not necessarily pertinent to Luke's understanding of the relationship between human prayer and the unpredictability of the divine response:

> Prayer itself, irrespective of what is actually said, is communication with the divine realm. As such it places one in the ideal position to receive whatever God may have to give. Thus prayer opens up a doorway between heaven and earth, but once that door is opened only God himself knows what may pass back through it from heaven to earth. (Ibid., p.115)

Crump notes that, in Luke–Acts, prayer is often accompanied by supernatural phenomena. Jesus receives the Spirit when he prays after his baptism (Luke 3:21); he is transfigured while at prayer (Luke 9:28f); and he is strengthened by an angel as he prays on the Mount of Olives.[11] But, crucially, these answers to his prayers have not been requested. This is especially evident in the case of the prayer on the Mount of Olives where the content of the prayer *is* specified. Through the prayer God has sent to Jesus the answer that he has determined is the most appropriate at the particular moment. This must mean that Luke's view of prayer is that it has opened up a channel of communication with God. It is not only a means by which humans address God but also a way in which humans open themselves so that God may address them (ibid., p.116).

Similar conclusions may be drawn from the prayer of Zechariah in the Temple (Luke 1:10ff) and from the prayers of the disciples in Acts 1:14. Furthermore, in Acts 4:29ff, while God *does* answer the specifics of prayer – the disciples do speak the word of God with boldness – it is also the case that what God gives here (the Holy Spirit who comes with outward signs) has not been specifically requested. If it be objected that Acts 8:14ff fails to fit into this pattern, because here the Spirit does appear to come upon the Samaritan Christians in direct answer to the Apostles' prayer, Crump nevertheless argues that in this passage the gift of the Spirit is in fact associated with the laying on of the Apostles' hands rather than their prayer, even though prayer and the laying on of hands are united in a single package.[12] While the Spirit might not be tied too definitely to whatever other elements may be present in the package, Crump asserts that it is nevertheless the case that in Acts 8:14 Luke is in fact clear as to the part of the particular package he wishes to associate with the gift of the Spirit. Crump may be a little too definite in his assertion here, but his general point that Luke shows how God sometimes responds to prayer in ways that go beyond what has been specifically requested may still be valid.

Elsewhere in Acts, God's communication through prayer often takes the form of visions, angelic visitations and other supernatural phenomena. Crump suggests that Luke presents these events as having taken place *through* prayer, but never *in answer to* prayer, because he wishes to preserve the independence of the divine will. Prayer is not magic, and can never become a way for humans to control the dispensation of God's Spirit which remains God's gift alone. For Luke, prayer cannot alter the fact that God's plan is already in operation; it simply opens a window through which human beings may see God's activity, attune themselves to it, and perhaps also become a part of it (ibid., pp.123–6).

As for prayer and the process of spiritual illumination, Crump asks whether in Luke–Acts spiritual insight results from one's own prayer or the prayer of others. He concludes that it is only in the Gospel that spiritual illumination comes as the result of another's intercession, and there it belongs to Jesus alone. Such illumination always concerns the person and status of Jesus (ibid., p.128). Crump additionally finds that the teaching of Jesus about prayer in the Gospel of Luke is also perfectly in line with the 'open door' dynamic between heaven and earth that we have already mentioned. He points out that Luke has omitted the Markan

material about praying with faith (Mark 9:28; 11:22f) and suggests that the reason for the omission may be that it appears to convey an attitude towards prayer that is at odds with the rest of Luke's theology of prayer. For Luke, it is the will of God and not the will of the one who prays that is decisive in the answering of the prayer: 'Prayer is not a means of instructing God, but of being instructed by God . . . God cannot be coerced, nor may ideas which fall outside of his will be grafted onto his plan by any degree of faith' (ibid., p.130).

We must now deal with the teaching about 'persistent prayer' in Luke 11:5–13,[13] 18:1–8. There has been considerable debate about the meaning of *anaideia* in Luke 11:8. The weight of the evidence appears to be that the word means 'shamelessness' rather than 'persistence'. If so, the parable is not about persistence in prayer but rather about the confidence with which one may approach a faithful God in prayer. Crump concludes: 'Luke is not teaching that one may bend God's will by first bending his ear. Prayer offered repeatedly is no more guaranteed to effect the desired result than is prayer offered faithfully enough' (ibid., p.131). However, while granting the rightness of eliminating ideas of persistence in prayer from Luke 11:5–8, the possibility that Luke supports the concept elsewhere in his Gospel remains open. As a matter of fact, Crump himself does wish to eliminate ideas of persistence in prayer from Luke 18:1ff as well as from Luke 11:5–8. He thinks that the parable – or, rather, Luke's use of it – is about perseverance in the face of oppression rather than teaching on petitionary prayer in general. Luke 18:1, therefore, is about strengthening belief in the value of prayer itself rather than persistence in prayer as such (ibid., p.132).

However, the matter may not be resolved so easily. Luke 18:1–8 presents a somewhat confused picture. The parable itself (Luke 18:2–5) is introduced in verse 1 in an indeterminate fashion as teaching on prayer in general (that is, that it should be constant and unfailing) without any explicit reference to particular prayer for the coming of the end. The interpretation of the parable itself remains open.[14] The possibilities do include teaching on perseverance as well as boldness in relation to God. It is an expression of the familiar eschatological theme of God's deliverance of the elect from oppression. At issue is what might be the proper attitude of disciples towards the Kingdom (in so far as it is still to come) and towards the Son of Man in the interim between his departure and return. They are to petition ceaselessly that what God has already inaugurated might quickly be brought to its consummation, and they are to hold themselves in expectation of this eventuality. Thus the idea of persistence in prayer might be stronger and more important for Luke, at least in this passage, than Crump attempts to make it. He is open to the criticism of overstating his case.

Turning to Luke 11:9–13, Crump comments that the Lukan change of the Matthaean 'good things' (*agatha*) to the Holy Spirit indicates that what Luke considers as 'good' is determined not by the request of the petitioner but by the will of God. God will not give God's children what is harmful even when they unwittingly ask for it. Thus a 'positive-answer-guaranteed' view of prayer is ruled out. Prayer is not a guaranteed means of getting whatever is asked for, but is rather

the means by which God gives what God judges to be good. Luke specifies this 'good thing' to be the Holy Spirit. Crump also points out here that Luke does not say that God gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask *for it*; he says God gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask *him* (that is, God). Thus *tois aitousin auton* is interpreted by Crump as meaning simply 'those who pray' rather than 'those who ask God (for the Holy Spirit)' – an indirect object is absent in the Greek. Since the emphasis in this passage has been on the dependability of God's giving good things to all it would seem unlikely, Crump thinks, that Luke would suddenly change this emphasis to one in which God gives the best gift only to those who consciously ask for it (ibid., pp.133f).

Crump therefore concludes that, so far as Luke is concerned, prayer is a channel through which God's will is revealed so that neither faith nor persistence nor even specific requests guarantee that the one who prays will receive exactly what is asked for. A 'positive' answer to prayer is simply an instance where the request happens to have coincided with the Father's will. In this, therefore, lies the effectiveness of Jesus' own prayer life. The corollary of this, in accordance with the 'open door dynamic' of prayer in Luke's Gospel, is that prayer must involve learning from God about God's will as much as, if not more than, asking God for anything (ibid., p.134).

Turning to Acts, Crump maintains that overall the pattern in this book is more that the Church's prayer is in agreement with God's plan rather than God's action being determined by the prayers of the Church. God enlists human prayer in the working out of the divine purpose, but the efficacy of the prayer is not decided by anything which the person who prays brings to it, except agreement with the will of God. Crump concludes: 'It would be difficult to find a more non-magical view of prayer than that presented in Luke–Acts' (ibid., p.135). But because we may not fully go along with Crump in his views about persistence in prayer it might be possible to suggest that there is, after all, room for us to contribute through our praying to the formation of the divine will. As we shall see in a later chapter, this is precisely what a process metaphysic allows.[15]

To continue, according to Crump prayer is one of the means by which the Father led the Son into and equipped him for his messianic ministry. What is communicated to Jesus through his prayer is his unique role as Saviour. This comes over as early in the Gospel as the account of the baptism in which Jesus appears as the final praying Prophet rather than as the prototype of the baptized Christian disciple. Nor even is Jesus in this passage a prototype of post-Pentecostal filling with the Spirit (ibid., pp.141f).

Crump also interprets Luke as showing how Jesus fulfils his mission through prayer. At Luke 5:16 and 6:12–20, as well as in the Jerusalem ministry, a threefold pattern emerges: Jesus' prayer is associated with the power to teach and heal, with his popularity with the people and with the extension of his ministry. Moreover, in Luke 6 his prayers also serve to reveal to Jesus the choice of his disciples so that when he descends to the plain he is accompanied by those for whom he has prayed and whom he has chosen (ibid., pp.142–7). This means that his prayer will extend to their mission also, as Luke will go on to show in Acts.

At Luke 11:1 the disciples ask to be taught how to pray. The passage certainly presents Jesus as a model of piety, although this may not exhaust the significance of the text. Crump thinks it is possible that the disciples were moved to ask Jesus to teach them to pray not simply as a result of seeing Jesus pray, but also as a direct result of Jesus' prayer itself. There may be a cause and effect relationship between the prayer and the request, especially as Luke has gone to great lengths to show that this is exactly the sort of result one would expect from Jesus' prayers (ibid., pp.147–8).

Crump therefore concludes that Jesus' prayer life is both similar and dissimilar to that of the disciple. It is similar in that prayer is a means of communicating God's will and of receiving revelation, visions, divine encouragement and confirmation of one's actions. This is the case in Acts as well as in the Gospel. However, it is dissimilar in that, while the general outline of the role played by prayer in Jesus' life is certainly a model for the Church, the specific details are unique. Jesus is

> *the praying* messianic Deliverer who is equipped with power, realises the whole of God's plan of salvation and pursues his course in triumphant obedience by means of prayer. Finally, Jesus' prayers are unique in that he alone is able to mediate the Father's revelation to others through them … Only Jesus prays so that others may come to see and hear who he truly is. (Ibid., p.153)

We must now return to the theme of Jesus as the heavenly intercessor already praying on earth in order to examine in fuller detail certain passages that have already been referred to. The first of these is the prayer for Peter's perseverance in Luke 22:31–2. Crump observes that this is the only occasion in Luke where Jesus informs his disciples concerning the content of a prayer that is otherwise unrecorded. There is also a question of whom exactly Jesus is addressing in this saying. In verse 31 there is the plural 'you' (*humas*), although the words themselves are addressed to Simon. But in verse 32 there is a singular: Jesus says to Simon 'I have prayed [aorist] for you (*peri sou*).' Crump suggests that Peter is being addressed here as the representative disciple because the issue of perseverance is of significance for the whole group, but that he is addressed in particular because of his coming temptation and denial (ibid., p.161). Satan's demand to 'sift the disciples like wheat' has a similarity with the heavenly court scene in the Prologue to the Book of Job, but unlike Job there is now a heavenly advocate to plead for the defence of God's people (ibid., p.155). Jesus here therefore is presenting himself as the heavenly intercessor and, according to Crump, this shows that this heavenly intercession has its roots not in the resurrection, ascension and exaltation of Jesus but rather in his earthly ministry as the praying messianic Deliverer. Furthermore, the use of the aorist assumes the efficacy of the prayer (ibid., p.156), which was not that the disciples might be saved from the trial but rather that they might be protected through it: 'The perseverance of the disciples' faith … is shown to be founded upon the intercession of the earthly Jesus' (ibid., pp.154–7).

The question now arises as to whether Jesus' prayer was ineffective in the case of Judas the betrayer. Crump mentions two possibilities: either that God denied

Jesus' prayer in the case of Judas or that Judas was not included in Jesus' intercession. He opts for the second of these. Jesus' prayer has thus served to separate two classes of individuals, with the effect that his prayers become the means of administering the personal application of individual election as well as the predetermined course of redemption history as a whole (ibid., pp.165f). Next under the spotlight is Jesus' prayer on the Mount of Olives (Luke 22:39–46). In this passage there is a contrast between Jesus who prays and the disciples who do not, implying a definite paradigmatic element in the story. Jesus who stands by prayer passes his test and proceeds to the cross, while the disciples fail through their lack of prayer. Judas, who is not protected by Jesus' intercession, suffers disaster, but the faith of the other disciples is not utterly destroyed because Jesus has prayed for them. However, their faith does undergo temporary failure because they have not prayed for themselves. Crump argues that in this passage Luke universalizes the paradigmatic significance of the disciples' failure to pray. There is a continuity between 'temptation' as the continuing experience of the Church and that of Jesus' disciples on the Mount of Olives. The outcome of all this is that, if this scene on the Mount of Olives is offered by Luke as the paradigm for the continuing necessity for Christian prayer, then Jesus' intercessory prayer in Luke 22:32 must also be offered as the paradigm for the continuing reality of Jesus as heavenly advocate. Because Luke is unequivocal about the fact that Jesus interceded for his people before the heavenly throne during his earthly ministry, and because he implies that Jesus continues to offer such intercession in heaven, it can be said that 'Luke is using his story of Jesus' life and ministry to offer a biographical development of the Christian belief in the ascended Jesus as the Church's heavenly Intercessor (ibid., p.175).

We are now in a position to summarize and assess Crump's arguments.[16] Firstly, Luke certainly presents Jesus as a model of piety. The fact that the course of his ministry is guided by his fellowship with the Father through prayer is of paradigmatic significance. This is especially the case in the introduction to the Lord's Prayer and in the scene on the Mount of Olives. In this latter passage, the juxtaposition of the disciples who do not pray and the praying Jesus makes it clear that Jesus is the person of prayer *par excellence*. This model of prayer is also given as a means of correcting popular misunderstandings about prayer. The exhortation to continue in prayer is governed by the question of divine sovereignty rather than *parousia* delay. For Luke, neither the power of faith nor, possibly, the weight of pious repetition ensures the granting of requests unless they lie within the scope of God's will. It is through their communion with God in prayer that the will of God is revealed to God's people. Prayer is thus a prime means of Christian growth in obedience because through it the Father leads those who pray in ways through which they may best participate in God's plans. Therefore prayer is a means of hearing from God as well as a means of asking God.

But, so far as Luke is concerned, Jesus is not only a model of Christian piety. His portrait of Jesus at prayer is also driven by Christological considerations. Jesus' prayer is integral to the accomplishment of his unique mission. As the unique Son, Jesus' prayers are always in accord with the Father's will. Through

prayer Jesus mediates the Father's revelation, calls his disciples, they come to see his status and he ensures their perseverance. Even the betrayal by Judas is effected through Jesus' prayer. Jesus is therefore not only a pious man, but also the unique Intercessor with special access to God, and his earthly work of prayer must also continue in heaven for as long as discipleship is tested here on earth.

What are the implications of Crump's insights for an overall theology of intercessory prayer? Even if it is true that Luke's paramount concern in his portrayal of Jesus as an intercessor is a Christological one, it is nevertheless the case that exhortatory concerns are not altogether absent. Jesus at prayer during his earthly life can indeed be taken as a model for human intercession. However, if it is also the case that the model of prayer provided by Jesus demonstrates that prayer is the prime means by which God reveals God's will, then the challenge of prayer lies in a willingness to submit to the divine will. Jesus' prayer was exemplary in this respect; only he prays fully in accord with the Father's will and only he always obeys the Father's will (ibid., p.239).

A comment anticipatory of conclusions to be drawn later on in this study may be apposite here. At issue is not only Luke's teaching that the will of God is a paramount consideration in any account of the nature of prayer; the nature of God's will and how it is to be understood and interpreted in the contemporary context is also at issue. In due course we shall opt for the account of the mutually interactive relationship of influence and causation between God and the world that process theology provides.[17] In such an account there is room not only for the communication by God to us of the divine will but also for our contribution to its formation. Persistence in prayer may have an important role to play in this process, without reducing the necessity for us also to yield to the divine will. Nevertheless, views of prayer that treat it as a magical way of satisfying our desires are certainly to be excluded.

However, it would be wrong to draw the conclusion that prayer can only ever be a means for an individual to become attuned to the divine will. Of course, any theology of intercessory prayer will include this as an element, but only an element. It is not fully clear, however, whether Crump believes that we should ever ask for anything more than a knowledge of God's will, or that prayer itself is anything more than a means of accepting, or of attuning oneself to, the will of God. What is clear from Luke–Acts is that God does respond in a positive way to human prayers when those prayers are in accordance with God's will. In this respect, the difference between Jesus' prayers and ours is a matter only of degree. He always prays in accordance with God's will; we may do so sometimes or just occasionally. Crump is right to remind us that it is through prayer that God gives what God wants us to have. There is also the very valid point that God may sometimes answer prayers unexpectedly in ways that go beyond what was specifically asked for. Even so, to pray that we might not 'come to the time of trial' (Luke 22:40), which Crump takes to be paradigmatic and to mean 'preserve through the time of trial', is surely to ask for as real an intervention by God in human life as to ask for anything else.[18]

But how does God so intervene? Crump, as we have seen, takes Luke's amendment of Matthew's 'good things' (*agatha*) to 'the Holy Spirit' in Luke

11:13 as an indication of his belief that only God, not the petitioner, may determine the way in which prayer is answered. While we might wish to modify what Crump asserts in this connection, it is still the case that God *does* 'give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him'. Such a thought prompts the further one that a brief exploration of the biblical language about spirit might prove fruitful for our enquiry into the nature of intercessory prayer. This brings us to a consideration of the thought of St. Paul.

Prayer and the Holy Spirit in the Pauline Literature

The monograph by G.P. Wiles (1974) provides our main source for the interpretation of the intercessory ministry of St. Paul. Wiles begins by admitting the difficulty of selecting and classifying the material. Many of the references to intercession are cast in indirect forms and often thanksgiving is closely interwoven with intercessory material, implying that the giving of thanks can also be regarded as a representative or intercessory activity. Wiles ultimately classifies (G.P. Wiles, 1974, p.17) the intercessory prayer material in Paul's letters into intercessory 'wish-prayers' (for example, 1 Thessalonians 3:11f), intercessory 'prayer-reports' (for example, Romans 1:9f), parenetic references to intercessory prayer and requests for/exhortations to such prayer (for example, Romans 15:30, Philippians 4:6), and didactic and speculative references to intercessory prayer (for example, Romans 8:26f). Wiles also concludes that there is little to be gained from a study of the meaning of the various words and expressions used by Paul to distinguish intercession from other kinds of prayer (ibid., p.21).

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to describe in detail the arguments that Wiles uses in presenting his case. Many of his conclusions concern not the meaning but the function of the intercessory prayer passages in the context both of Paul's letters themselves and of his pastoral relationships with the Churches. For instance, according to Wiles, the prayer passages function mainly to reinforce the message of the letters and reflect the occasion that prompted them. In the light of his view that Paul's letters were to be read in association with the celebration of the Eucharist, Wiles also detects a liturgical function in many of them (ibid., p.70). He also suggests that Paul's sense of pastoral responsibility takes on a representative or priestly character in those passages in which he anticipates the *parousia* when he will be called to account for his ministry and when he will be able to present his readers as an offering to the Lord at his coming (ibid., pp.50, 68, 154, 294). This priestly role is expressed in such 'wish-prayers' as 1 Thessalonians 3:11ff and 5:23f. The eschatological dimension also appears in Wiles' examination of what he calls 'intercessory prayer-reports' (ibid., pp.156ff). Examples of these can be found in Romans 10:1, 2 Corinthians 9:14, 13:7, 9b and Philemon 4–6. Wiles remarks that sometimes such prayer-reports are found in thanksgiving passages which are often placed at the beginning of Paul's letters. This joining together of thanksgiving and intercession means that as an intercessor Paul is paying tribute to the spiritual successes of his readers so that he may pray

for more successes. In the situation of heightened eschatological expectation that prevailed in his day this combination of thanksgiving and intercession further reflects an underlying sense of a double situation, with the spiritual successes of Paul's readers continually associated with new occasions of need. It also brings out the paradox of rejoicing in tribulation which turns the very circumstances about which intercession is to be made into occasions for thanksgiving. Such thanksgiving could only be made in the awareness of grace that had already been given.

Wiles also has some interesting and relevant things to say about the prayer-report in Romans 9:3,[19] which has added significance when it is coupled with the teaching about intercession in Chapter 8 which immediately precedes it. In Romans 8 the Holy Spirit and the exalted Christ are intercessors for Christians, whereas in Romans 9 and 10 it is Paul who becomes the intercessor for Israel. Even though in Romans 8:39 Paul has just affirmed that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus the Lord, nevertheless as an intercessor he must be willing to offer himself to be separated from Christ on behalf of his own people. Just as God did not spare the Son but gave him up for us all (Romans 8:32), so Christian intercessors must not spare themselves, but offer themselves freely for the sake of others. Wiles believes that, by telling his readers of his own deeply felt intercessions on behalf of Israel, Paul is appealing to them to become similarly involved in their intercessions for one another. This raises the interesting possibility that a human intercessor may be accepted by God as an additional means of atonement on behalf of another (the Greek word *huper* is used in Romans 9:3) (ibid., pp.255f).

Wiles believes, furthermore, that in accordance with ancient custom the very act of writing was for Paul a conscious offering up of intercessory prayer to God (ibid., pp.71, 90). But the relationship was a reciprocal one. In his letters Paul invited his readers to pray for him. In this way a network of intercessory prayer undergirding both Paul's ministry and the life of the Churches was built up (ibid., p.155). Such a network of intercession entailed a dynamic three-way relationship between Paul, those for whom he was concerned and God. This is something also seen in such curse passages[20] as 1 Corinthians 5:3–5. In this passage Paul's spirit is mediated to the Corinthians in his absence 'with the power of the Lord Jesus' (*sun tẹ dunamei tou Kyriou hēmon Iēsou*). Wiles comments that it is with the help of (*sun*) the power of the Lord that there is 'a constantly effective intercessory link' between Paul and the Christians in Corinth, so that even in a time of bodily separation Christ's power is released through and by the network of mutual intercessory prayer. On this particular occasion, 'it is the power of the Lord as Judge which is brought into operation in a special way through Paul's pronouncement' (ibid., pp.145f), but there can be no doubt that the principle works in a positive as well as in a negative way. There is further reinforcement of the point that this network of intercession is a means of releasing the power of Christ in Wiles' review of Paul's various requests and exhortations about intercessory prayer. One of them is of particular relevance for our purpose (ibid., pp.276ff). Philippians 1:19f implies that Paul is relying for his deliverance on the

partnership in prayer he has with the Philippians, but he adds that it will be with the aid of the Spirit that their intercessions will become effective. The power of God, which is released through the network of intercessory prayer and which Wiles calls 'a living fellowship of mutual love and concern in Christ' (ibid., p.284; see also p.229), comes about through the agency of the Holy Spirit. This insight into the mutuality of intercession realized in and through the Spirit is of particular relevance for the purposes of our enquiry into the nature of intercessory prayer, but it means that we must proceed by giving brief attention to some facets of the Pauline teaching about the Spirit.

C.F.D. Moule (1978) identifies some aspects of the working of the Spirit that will be helpful to our enquiry into the nature of intercessory prayer. We must, firstly, take note of the fact that Paul uses terms almost interchangeably, most notably in Romans 8:9–11. Moule comments that, instead of the Spirit, one could speak of the presence of God in Jesus Christ, or of God powerfully at work through Jesus Christ (ibid., p.5). The 'Holy Spirit' and 'Jesus' are used to mean almost the same thing. Schweizer says that this was not a metaphysical issue for Paul and that no material distinction can be discerned between the terms used in Romans 8:9–11 (Schweizer, 1968, p.433). Our abiding in Christ is also an abiding in the Spirit, and the abiding of Christ in us is also an abiding of the Spirit. Christians live within the scope of a power that shapes their whole life and being, a power that is identical with the exalted Lord considered in terms of his work towards the Christian community. However, caution does need to be taken in making assertions such as these. Christ language and Spirit language are almost interchangeable in Paul, but not quite. Paul's preferred language seems rather to speak of our being 'in Christ', while on the other hand he speaks of the Spirit 'in us'. In the undisputed Pauline letters, 'Christ in us' is very rare (only in Galatians 2:20?), as is the notion of humans being 'in the Spirit'.

Moule devotes a whole chapter (Moule, 1978, ch.2, pp.7ff) to the anthropological question of the relationship between the Spirit of God and the human spirit. In 1 Corinthians 2:9–16 the concept of spirit is used by Paul to help bridge the gap between a transcendent God and the creation, and to express the kinship between the divine and the human. Moule comments: '[Paul] dares to express the affinity between God's Spirit and something in man by using the single word *pneuma* for both' (ibid., p.9). He points out that there is a similar usage of the concept of *pneuma* in Romans 8:16. If, therefore, there is to be enlightenment and insight the two spirits – that of God and the human – have to come together (ibid., p.10). Human beings are *capax dei*, a possibility fully realized through Christ in whom supremely the self-consciousness of God and human self-consciousness are found as one (ibid., p.12). Thus for Paul spirit is a useful concept to express both the transcendence of God and, paradoxically, God's accessibility to humans. But is it realistic to speak of spirit as a necessary property of a human being as such? What of the spirit of a person who makes no conscious response to God? Moule suggests that *pneuma* comes very near to being synonymous with the human self so that human beings have an innate capacity to recognize and receive God (ibid., p.16).[21] He believes that it is true to the general tendency of biblical thinking to

say that there is an aspect of the human personality capable of responding to the divine (ibid., p.17). In this Moule is supported by G.W.H. Lampe (1977) who also defines the human spirit in terms of the capacity of human persons to respond to a personal God. 'Spirit' is thus an ideal term to denote both human beings as rational, feeling, willing personalities and the creative, life-renewing power of God (ibid., p.44). Referring to Romans 8:9–11, Lampe comments that for Paul the Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of God so that the union between God and humanity in Jesus is in a sense re-enacted in every believer. The work of the Holy Spirit 'thus consists of the remodelling of the human spirit so as to reproduce something of the human qualities of Jesus' (Lampe, 1977, p.79).

Towards a New Testament Model of Intercessory Prayer

We must now see what happens when we juxtapose this Pauline theology of the Spirit with our earlier conclusions concerning Luke's theology of prayer. Prominent among these conclusions is the role played by the will of God. Prayer is a means of revelation of the divine will and of our reception of what God wills to give. Those who pray must seek to attune themselves to this will of God and by such means perhaps come to participate in God's purposes. Answers to prayer may or may not be in accordance with the wish expressed by those who pray: it depends on how the will of God is expressed in the particular situation. Where the answer corresponds to the wish, that is only because the wish was in accordance with the divine will, but there will also be occasions where what is granted in response to the prayer goes beyond what was asked for because God so wills it. This emphasis on the paramount will of God in relation to prayer also excludes any magical, 'answer-guaranteed' view of the nature of intercessory prayer. However, since, unlike Crump, we would not wish to rule out altogether the value and importance of persistence in prayer, there may also be a place for our prayers helping to shape the will of God. Overall, then, we can accept that there is a real intervention by God in human life in response to prayer. Above all, Luke sees the Holy Spirit as the supremely good thing that God wills for God's children, and it is given to 'those who pray'.

Alongside this, we can note that Schweizer, referring to Romans 8:15, 26f, and Galatians 4:6, says that 'the proper act of *pneuma* is prayer' (Schweizer, 1968, p.430). If we therefore apply the aspects of the Spirit's work which we have been considering to the relation between prayer and the Spirit it might be possible to come to the conclusion that answers to prayer come about through persons as the Spirit impinges upon them. In the first place, it is the Spirit who inspires and motivates prayer and, in Romans 8:26, also indwells Christians, relates them to God and makes contact with him, turning our 'groans' into prayer (Moule, 1978, p.31). Lampe (1977, pp.87ff) also has an interpretation of prayer in terms of the Spirit. Referring to Romans 8:26–7, he characterizes prayer as a 'theandric operation' in which at a very deep level of human personality God's Spirit takes the initiative and interacts with the human spirit, inspiring a prayerful response.

Thus prayer is God's own activity incarnated in the thoughts and aspirations and concerns of human beings and expressed in human language. But it is at the same time a human activity, so that we cannot describe prayer as one divine person speaking to another.[22] This interpretation by Moule and Lampe of Paul's use of spirit language and its application to prayer also supports Wiles' insight that the practice of intercessory prayer provides a network through which the Spirit operates. Human intercession is therefore but an extension of the intercessory ministry of the exalted Christ (Romans 8:34) and of the indwelling Spirit (Romans 8:15f, 23, 26f) (G.P. Wiles, 1974, p.5). But this is not the same as saying that human intercession is modelled upon the heavenly intercession of Christ, since, as we have seen, it is the earthly prayer-life of Jesus as presented particularly by Luke which is paradigmatic for Christians, and not his heavenly ministry of prayer, even though there is a continuity between the two.

Intercession presupposes a relationship between the intercessor and those prayed for. That relationship is most fully established within the Christian community indwelt by the Holy Spirit, but it is not impossible to envisage a bridge between Christian intercessors and those they pray for who are not Christians, given the remarks above about the innate capacity of human beings to respond to God. We may remind ourselves here that Luke, in particular, conceives of the Spirit in mainly Jewish terms.[23] We must also remember that in the Old Testament the *ruach* of God was conceived of as not only inspiring the prophets but also equipping rulers. It is possible, therefore, to speak of God's Spirit guiding secular affairs as well as being concerned with spiritual matters. In this connection, Timothy Gorringe (1986) discusses at length the biblical language about Spirit where it is used to denote God's operation within human affairs. He shows that at no point in the Old Testament is the Spirit concerned with purely 'religious realities', but rather that this language speaks of God's guidance of and intervention in secular political activities and, in particular, of the establishment of justice (ibid., p.81). He writes:

> In the prophetic tradition (which includes the historical books in the Hebrew canon) the Spirit always comes to liberate, to bring rest or peace, and to judge, or establish righteousness. In the Wisdom tradition it is the Spirit which enables wise government in village, tribe or kingdom. The priestly tradition emphasises the connection between Spirit and all forms of 'life'. (Ibid., p.87)

He adds: 'The Spirit is connected therefore not accidentally but deeply and essentially (though of course not solely) with politics, history, rule and order, with freedom, justice and a new society' (ibid., p.88).

Gorringe proceeds to survey the New Testament language about Spirit, and at the end brings this together with his conclusions from his survey of the Old Testament material. He claims that the language about Spirit witnesses to the fact that 'history cannot be reduced to the history of men and women', but that Spirit language is also a recognition that God 'makes history through men and women' (ibid., p.107). To speak of Spirit is to speak of a specific directedness to human history, and also to speak of the openness of history:

> Within history God is the Creator of hope, the source of all generous visions, of all human openness. He inspires dreams of a society where the rule of God will be realised. 'Spirit' language speaks of God revealing himself as merciful, gracious, longsuffering and loving, and this revelation ... inspires hope for human behaviour which is likewise compassionate and loving. (Ibid., pp.107f)

Thus, for Gorringe, the Spirit is to be found in 'what humanises, what makes for life, for the establishment of truth in community, for mutuality, for shared responsibility, for freedom' (ibid., p.108). He also claims that 'the Spirit who inspires and creates behaviour and situations which are really human is not limited to Israel or the Church, but in that tradition, sacramentally for all human traditions, the true trend and direction of the Spirit is discerned' (ibid.). The importance of this for our study is obviously that, if Spirit language can be applied to the whole range of human activity, the scope of intercessory prayer is similarly unlimited.

But what about the non-human creation? Is it possible to envisage intercession in this case? Moule has a section on the application of 'spirit' to the work of creation. Such an application is, he says, rare in the Old Testament (Genesis 1:2 can be understood in other ways) and it is more prominent in the intertestamental literature. In the New Testament, Spirit is scarcely mentioned, except as among Christians and as the agent of the new creation. The New Testament writers found the term 'Spirit' less appropriate for describing the divine activity outside those who consciously respond to God and outside humankind than certain other terms such as *Logos* or wisdom. It is Christ or the *Logos*, not the Spirit, who in the New Testament is cosmic in scope. In spite of this, Moule concludes that it is not illegitimate to use the term 'spirit' in a broad and generalized way, provided such users know what they are doing (Moule, 1978, pp.17–21). In this connection Moule has some very suggestive remarks to make about Romans 8:22ff. Paul has already (Romans 5:12) described Adam's disobedience as having universal repercussions. Furthermore, human disobedience was regarded in Genesis 3 as involving the natural environment. Such considerations lead Moule to suggest that, in Romans 8, Paul is 'unconsciously' expounding a theology of the environment, a 'Christian ecology': 'the Spirit, already working in and through men, is instrumental in this ecological adjustment, in so far as the Spirit enables choices and decisions to be made in line with God's will' (ibid., p.35). Such thoughts may enable us to suggest that the impact of intercessory prayer upon the non-human creation is mainly indirect, coming about through the Spirit's influence upon human beings. Still, this does not necessarily rule out direct action by God on the non-human creation in response to human prayer.

To sum up, when we pray, which is of itself the work of the indwelling Spirit, the answer to our prayer is the gift of the same Holy Spirit who wills and enables freedom, justice, peace and love. These are the good things that the Father wills to give in response to the prayers of God's children. But God gives them mostly through persons who are led consciously or unconsciously by the Spirit to respond to God's guidance and to act in such ways. We shall build on this conclusion in the

next chapter as we proceed to an examination of the thought of theologians who work from a personalist perspective.

Notes

1 An example here in the area of Old Testament scholarship is that of Samuel E. Balentine (1993) in which the author holds that, in the Hebrew Scriptures, prayer functions, among other things, to depict human character, to characterize God, and as a vehicle of theodicy. Only about a quarter of his book is actually given over to the theology of Hebraic prayer.
2 It might be added here that Oscar Cullmann (1995) contributes few further relevant insights to the conclusions that will be drawn in this chapter.
3 Mark has six references to the Spirit; Matthew, 12; Luke, 17 (18?); Acts 57 in total; and John 15.
4 cf. Fitzmyer (1981, p.230): 'the role of the Spirit as a starter is clearly not limited to the beginning of the Period of the Church'.
5 This assumes, of course, that the Matthaean *agatha* is original. See also the debate between D.R. Catchpole and C.M. Tuckett referred to at note 13 below.
6 Fitzmyer (1981, p.228), agrees: 'In most instances Luke depicts the Spirit as it appears in the OT . . . the Lukan Spirit denotes God's active, creative, or prophetic presence to his world or his people.'
7 Priestly angels are referred to in T. Levi. 3:4–6; references to angelic intercession can be found throughout 1 Enoch, and also in Tob. 12:15 and T. Dan. 6:2. For Michael as heavenly priest, see 3 Enoch 38–40; also 1 Enoch 9:1–11, 15:2, 40:6, 47:2, 99:3, 104:1. For these and other references, see Attridge (1989, pp.99–100, nn.236–9 and p.51, n.24.
8 For example, Abraham (Genesis 18, 20), Moses (Exodus 32, Numbers 14:13ff), Samuel (1 Samuel 7:8, 12:19 & 23, 15:11), Amos (7:2 & 5f), Jeremiah (14:7ff).
9 For a summary of Crump's thesis concerning Luke's portrayal of Jesus as the final, eschatological, praying Prophet, see pp.16–17 above.
10 Crump constantly asserts that in Luke's teaching God always answers prayer only in accordance with the divine will.
11 Crump argues for the authenticity of these verses, pp.117–21.
12 As we have already observed (p.16 above), Luke binds up the Spirit with prayer, baptism and the laying on of hands into a single package in which far and away the most important element is the bestowal of the Spirit.
13 See here also the debate between D.R. Catchpole and C.M. Tuckett concerning Luke 11:5–8 in Catchpole (1983, pp.467ff; 1989, pp.377ff) and Tuckett (1989, pp.367ff). Catchpole seeks to recover a pre-Lukan form of the parable by removing Luke 11:8a and interprets it in terms of the certainty of an answer to prayer for the basic necessities of life, that is material blessings. Tuckett argues that prayer in Q confines itself to eschatological blessings.
14 See Evans (1990, pp.634ff). The interpretation of Luke 18:1–8 held by Marshall (1978, p.670) is that a parable about prayer in general has been turned, by the addition of vv.6–8, into a parable about prayer concerning the need to be ready for the coming of the Son of Man. In Marshall's opinion the parable on its own teaches the need for importunity in prayer.

15 See Chapter 6 below and also the comments on p.30.
16 See Crump's own summary on p.177 of his monograph.
17 See Chapter 6 below.
18 The point may also be made that to ask God to change a mental state (for instance, by supplying knowledge of God's will) is to ask for as real a change in the world as, for instance, a change in the weather.
19 We can take this to mean a prayer, and not merely as a rhetorical device: see Romans 10:1, and compare both Pauline verses with Exodus 32:31f.
20 Wiles calls them 'a type of negative intercession' focused on particular offenders (G.P. Wiles, 1974, p.122).
21 It must be noted, however, that Schweizer believes that, although Paul can freely use popular ideas concerning the psychological make-up of human beings, even so Paul still considers that the human *pneuma* is something that is God-given and as such is a vehicle for the Spirit of God. God's Spirit, which 'never evaporates into the *pneuma* given individually to man', is also 'the innermost ego of the one who no longer lives by his own being but by God's being for him'. See Schweizer (1968, pp.435f).
22 Thus disagreeing with Dodd (1959, p.150). Lampe also interprets the 'inarticulate groans' of Romans 8:26 as our human efforts to pray, rather than in terms of charismatic prayer, as in some commentators, such as Käsemann.
23 See above, p.15 and especially note 6.

Chapter 3

Why is it Necessary to Pray?

The issue that will concern us in this chapter is: what kind of a God is it to whom we pray? What does the practice of intercession teach us about the traditional propositions of classical theism concerning the omnipotence, omniscience and goodness of God? For there is no doubt that these concepts, as traditionally understood, challenge the meaningfulness of petitionary and intercessory prayer. We will argue that the challenge can be addressed if we conceive prayer in terms of a personal relationship with God. Indeed, at the end of the last chapter we were moving towards the position that, to do justice to the New Testament's own understanding, we should think of prayer in the context of a relationship of human persons with a God who is also seen as being fully personal. By 'person' here we do not mean person as that word has come to be understood in Western culture generally today, as an individual subject in isolation from others. Rather, the concept of person makes sense only when seen in the context of relationship. There is a network of intercession formed by those who pray, those who are prayed for and the Holy Spirit. We must now build on this through a consideration of the thought of those theologians and philosophers who can be said to be personalist in their outlook.

Why there is a Problem

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus teaches his followers how to pray. At one point he says: 'Your Father knows what you need before you ask him' (Matthew 6:8). People of faith assert that an omniscient God knows everything in the universe that it is possible to know. They also affirm that an almighty God can do anything that is in accordance with God's will. Above all, they maintain that God is love and is wholly good. In the light of these beliefs we might expect that God would provide what we need without our having to ask for it in the first place. But it is plain that God does not immediately give us all we need. There are some things for which we have to ask. But why? Does God both love us and know what we need, yet lack the power to give it? Or does God have both the power and the knowledge, but lack in love so that we do not receive what we need? Or again, in spite of what Jesus says, might God be lacking in the knowledge of what we need, while still having both the power and the desire to give it to us? In so far as these questions bear upon an understanding of what happens when we pray, the issue has been trenchantly put in a paper by David Basinger, who writes: 'that the believer desires divine assistance in various situations is perfectly understandable.

But that a believer would feel the need to request such assistance from a being who is more knowledgeable, concerned and powerful than he or she is not' (Basinger, 1983, p.26).

In short, the proposition that God acts in certain ways only as a result of being asked appears to call into question either the omnipotence, or the omniscience, or the goodness of God, or all of them together. On the other hand, the omnipotence, omniscience and goodness of God may likewise seem to call into question the need for petitionary and intercessory prayer.

There are three possible responses to such arguments. One is to accept the validity of the traditional understanding of God's power, knowledge and love. In such a case we will need to reinterpret prayer, possibly in terms of therapeutic meditation.[1] If the only change that prayer works is on the person who prays then there need be no questions concerning God's knowledge, power and love in relation to the results of praying. This argument assumes, of course, that it is *the act of praying* that has brought about the change in the person who prays. However, it is questionable whether this can be called prayer in any real sense. It would appear to be more like some self-help psychological technique, comparable with the so-called 'power of positive thinking'. If, however, we affirm that this change in the mind and heart and soul of the person who has prayed has been brought about *by God* as a result of the prayer, then we are back with our problem, for something desirable has occurred that might not otherwise have happened had the prayer not been uttered. In this case we might very well ask again why God did not bring about this desirable change apart from the prayer. Furthermore, if God can thus be thought of as capable of bringing about changes in those who pray, we might also ask why God is not able to effect changes in those who are prayed for as well. And if God is so able to effect such changes then the reduction of prayer to therapeutic meditation would appear to be unnecessary. There thus seems to be something self-contradictory about this reduction of prayer to therapeutic meditation when its consequences and effects are regarded as being brought about by God.

The reinterpretation of petitionary and intercessory prayer in terms of therapeutic meditation as a way of overcoming the problem of God not appearing to provide at least some of what we need without being asked for it is therefore an unsatisfactory solution for the religious believer. But there are other possibilities for overcoming the problems in connection with intercessory prayer associated with traditional understandings of the attributes of God. One that will be explored in this chapter is a reinterpretation of God's power and knowledge in a way that leaves room for petitionary and intercessory prayer. Another solution is to consider the issues in the light of a personal relationship with a God who is also seen to be fully personal. It is when we analyse the conditions that determine whether a relationship is personal or not that we may come to see why it is that some things can be given only in response to a direct request, and not automatically.

Persons in Prayer

Basinger's article is a reply to Eleonore Stump (1979), who believes that the nature of the relationship God desires with human beings is one of 'loving friendship'; that is, a personal relationship. She suggests that, for a relationship to be personal, particularly so that human beings might be genuinely free agents, an omnipotent, omniscient and perfectly good God may need to exercise self-restraint. Thus God may sometimes refrain from doing everything that is possible or even desirable until requested to do so. When we see the matter in terms such as these petitionary prayer may then become a meaningful theistic exercise. Stump develops the concept of a loving friendship between human beings and God by emphasizing the importance of relational growth. She suggests that in a relationship between an inferior and a superior being there is a danger of the former being either dominated or spoilt. For this reason, God may not intervene until requested, not so much because human freedom limits the divine ability to intervene, but because to do so without being asked would either spoil or dominate the other party in the relationship. The prayer of asking can therefore be understood as a safeguard against these dangers. It acts as a kind of 'buffer' between God and human beings, helping to preserve the element of distance that is as necessary as intimacy to a truly personal relationship or friendship.

Basinger objects that, in the case of the non-believer who never prays, for God so to refrain from intervening until requested will not help to develop a more meaningful relationship because, in such a case, on the human side at least, a relationship with God does not exist. This could lead to the conclusion that the non-believer could be the recipient of more beneficial divine intervention than the believer because there is no reason for God not to intervene as in the case of the believer whose relationship with God would be helped by God's refraining from intervening until requested to do so. This perhaps misses the point of Stump's argument. A God who may refrain from intervening until asked has every reason not to intervene in the case of a person who never prays. Stump also provides the example of good parents who do give their children what they need without their asking for it, but also, as those children grow up, seek to encourage them to ask for what they want. The point is that growth to a responsible, independent and mature adulthood means learning how to take responsibility for one's own life and ensuring for oneself that one's own needs are met as far as possible. Wise parents, therefore, will sometimes not give their children what they see they need, but wait until they recognize their need and ask that it be met; otherwise the children's personal and emotional growth might be hindered. In the case of our relationship to God, therefore, it is possible that we are not able to receive the help that is readily available until we see and admit our need and pray that it be supplied.

Thus, in the case of believers and non-believers alike, God has every reason for refraining from intervening until they are in a position to ask. It would be a diminishment of our personhood and freedom if we had everything done for us without asking. It is inanimate objects and sub-personal creatures who have everything done for them or who have what they need given them without asking

for it. Of course, we could observe that God makes the sun shine and the rain fall on just and unjust alike (Matthew 5:45), which seems like a doing of things unasked. However, in this connection Vincent Brümmer makes the helpful suggestion that we make a distinction between God's mere *bringing about* impersonally what is needed without being asked and God's *giving* us something in a personal way (Brümmer, 1984, p.47). There is a difference between our being simply objects of God's care and persons with whom God seeks a personal relationship (ibid., p.51). Arguing, as David Basinger does, that in the case of those who do not pray God has no reason not to intervene (on the grounds that the personal aspect of the relationship with God is absent and so does not need safeguarding) does not take this distinction into account. It would not be wrong, therefore, to conclude that in the context of a personal relationship petitionary prayer is not superfluous but may be a necessary condition for God to give us what we need. The invitation to ask, for at least some things, could be seen as an invitation to mature personhood and responsible relationship with God. We could also argue, as does Stump, that God might still perform on our behalf the acts that God desires, even if not requested to do so, but not in the same time or by the same process, so that prayer does make a difference. However, this solution does not really remove the difficulty that God's power and goodness seem to be compromised by the need to pray. The other ways in which God might act might not be as beneficial for the one who in a particular instance does not pray; or, if they are and the person still prays, then the prayer actually makes no difference to the final outcome.

Basinger admits that there are some plausible arguments in all this in the case of petition for one's own needs, but they become problematic in the case of intercession for the needs of other people. He thinks that for God to intervene without their asking in the lives of other people in response to others' intercession is a violation of their freedom. However, it need not necessarily be the case that for God to intervene in this way would be a violation of freedom. We could imagine certain acts which force a person to be free, such as being driven from a sheltered existence to become mature and responsible. Another instance might be the model of compulsory psychiatric treatment, in which psychiatrists do not wait for patients to ask for the treatment which, if successful, would promote their freedom and well-being. On the contrary, psychiatrists do intervene in such cases precisely because others (for example, the police, the social services, and so on) have asked them to do so. There is also the example of the treatment of a patient in a coma where the doctor does not refrain from medical intervention on the grounds that to do so would be a violation of the comatose person's freedom. Indeed, it is also possible to argue in such a case that the personal relationships analogous to intercessory prayer are the ones that exist between the doctor and the patient's relatives or friends who are anxious that everything possible be done to save the patient.

There is the further argument that God's goodness might be compromised if blessings were withheld from some people because others fail to pray for them. Paul Fiddes makes the point starkly when he writes: 'Does God really say (in

effect), "I would have healed Mary if you had only asked me, but I waited for all eternity to hear your prayer and it didn't arrive, so I decided not to build this into my plan for the world."?' (Fiddes, 2000, p.138). In this respect, Brümmer points out that a misunderstanding of prayer may arise when the relational character of prayer is not taken into account (Brümmer, 1984, p.57). It is not a question of the prayer changing *either* God *or* the one who prays, but rather of the prayer affecting the relationship between them. Citing the 'double agency' theory of God's action in the world he suggests that intercession is an activity in which those who pray both ask God to act on behalf of the person or cause prayed for and also, through their prayers, make themselves available to God as a means through which God can act in answering their prayer. Both God and the intercessors thus become partners in the achievement of what is being asked. This is similar to the view put forward by Fiddes, who suggests that prayer is a means of Creator and creation entering into a partnership through which healing for individuals and society may come about. However, he presents this view in a strongly Trinitarian context in which human requests draw those who pray into the movements of relationship in God, 'the dance of the divine perichoresis', where they may affect the lives of others (Fiddes, 2000, pp.138–9). The advantage of views such as these is that intercessory prayer cannot be an evasion of responsibility because it requires that those who pray seek to align their wills with the will of God. It also means that corporate prayer may become more effective than individual prayer because of the way it enlists more people in the realization of God's will.[2]

What of requests to God to manipulate the natural environment? Basinger does not think that the freedom model is relevant in such cases. However, there are some theologians of the process school who affirm the responsiveness of, and therefore also the possibility of divine influence upon, the non-human creation as well as upon human beings. We shall discuss such ideas in a later chapter.

Sufficient has been said, perhaps, to indicate not only that the conceptual problems of petitionary and intercessory prayer addressed to an omnipotent, omniscient and wholly good God can be overcome, but that these problems are actually countered when such prayer is considered in the context of a personal relationship with a God who is seen as being personal. We shall develop such an understanding as we now turn to a discussion of prayer in the thought of theologians and thinkers of the personalist school. We shall particularly note the ways in which they reinterpret the concepts of divine omnipotence and omniscience.

Understanding the Nature of God and of Prayer

John Oman

The first theologian whose thought we shall consider is John Oman, but before we come to his contribution to the discussion on prayer in relation to the divine attributes we shall need to give an account of his theological method. He suggests

that the conclusion that intercessory prayer may be unnecessary could be a logical deduction from certain premises, starting from a particular way of conceiving the attributes of God. Oman asks whether, in fact, we should start from human experience rather than from abstract principles. A quotation from *Grace and Personality* makes the point:

> How shall we ask? Is it to be found in the old way of arguing down from the throne of God, of propounding what seems to us fitting in the relation of an Infinite Being to his finite creatures, or is it to be upward from the actual position we occupy here below? (Oman, 1960, p.44)

One has to begin, therefore, not from an abstract notion of God and of the attributes of God, but from what is experienced as divine action in human life. Oman believes that we have no 'vantage ground' for 'mapping out from above God's operations'. We have clarity and confidence only if we can 'see grace as it works on earth and understand it as it affects our experience' (ibid., p.45). For this reason theology should start from a reflection upon the full scope of human experience. But this is not to set us at a disadvantage. As Oman says, 'to look up from earth [is] the only place from which to understand a relation to us which is of love in the sense at least of being considerate of what we are' (ibid.). The result of this shift in the starting place for theology is that the way God's grace operates can no longer be seen as 'omnipotence guided by omniscience'. According to Stephen Bevans, the experience that Oman talks about as being necessary for theology is 'a knowledge of reality that comes from an attentiveness and faithfulness to life'; that is, 'an experience of the graciousness and challenge of one's life which is the result of authentic living' (Bevans, 1992, p.61). Theology for Oman was the attempt to describe and evaluate this experience.

Concerning his thought about a personal God, Oman begins with the long-standing controversy about God's grace and human freedom and which of them has priority. We have Augustine and Calvin on one side, Pelagius and Arminius on the other. The debate is later continued in a more secular form in the opposition of Rationalism and Romanticism (Oman, 1960, pp.27–33). Bevans suggests that the modern, totally secularized form of this debate is found in the contrast of the instinct of human beings that they have significance with the overwhelming feeling of insignificance in the face of the vast universe that cosmology has opened up (Bevans, 1992, p.64). This leads to the thought that, at bottom, the question is not merely theological, but has to do with what it means to be human (ibid., p.66).

Each side in this debate had some truth on its side. Oman suggests that Augustinianism and Calvinism were right in their insistence that faith has to rely totally on God (Oman, 1960, p.35). And, although Pelagianism and Arminianism cause 'men to seek security in their own doing, or, what is worse, in their own emotions, creating in them a restless endeavour to excite their souls in public or to impose upon themselves disciplines in private' (ibid., p.36), they nevertheless represent a protest against making God 'the most overwhelming of all forces, the most destructive of any reality to which the name personality could be given'

(ibid., p.38). Human beings must be what Oman calls 'moral personalities'; that is, both free and independent.

For Oman the moral person is constituted by self-determination, self-direction and self-consciousness (ibid., pp.47ff). A person cannot be self-determined if the will is controlled by God. In reality, however, 'of no fact ... are we more directly conscious than responsibility' (ibid., p.48). Furthermore, moral personalities who are self-directed must legislate for themselves and not 'allow a judgment of right to be imposed upon (them) by other people's consciences' (ibid., p.53). Finally, self-conscious people are those who realize that they 'act in a world which is [their] own and in which they see the full scope of [their] personal independence' (ibid., p.56). Oman considers that what is essential to the idea of moral personality is that the will is independent in such a way as to make sense of the phrase: 'we can because we ought' (ibid., pp.62f). Even though the essential quality of a religious person is to be absolutely dependent upon God, nevertheless religion does not flourish by undermining the independence of a moral personality (ibid., pp.57ff).

For this reason, moral independence and religious dependence are not opposed to one another. Rather, they are essential to each other. As F.G. Healey says:

> Our moral personality is related to an outside world upon which we are dependent and which becomes our moral sphere precisely because we are dependent upon it; and yet which would leave no room for any moral reality if we could not at the same time be its master and not merely its creature. (Healey, 1965, pp.49f)

There could thus be no moral freedom in a world that had no moral relation to us. As Oman says, grace is grace and not a force because it comes to the aid of our moral personality. Grace is thus conceived as being itself personal. Being dependent upon a God who is in personal relation to us turns our dependence upon God from being a violation of our self-reliance and self-respect into 'independence and mastery'. Where both Augustine and Pelagius went wrong was in ignoring this personal relation. When they spoke of grace they meant 'not a Father, but a force'.[3]

This may seem like a rather quick move from talking about the personal nature of the world to speaking of a personal God. Although Oman has his critics in this respect he is defended by Bevans who thinks that, although Oman could have made his thought clearer in this respect, the move is legitimate in terms of his theological method (Bevans, 1992, p.77). Another problem is the way Oman speaks of God as 'a person'. Is this a use of language that should have been avoided? However, Bevans believes that for Oman 'to say that God is "a person" ... is to understand that God relates to men and women in a personal way' (ibid., p.79). We may therefore conclude with Bevans that the key to Oman's thought is his 'thoroughly personalist way of speaking about God' (ibid., p.82): 'A personal God takes seriously the nature of human persons as called to freedom ... not compelling, but persuading men and women towards a saving relationship through an indirect presence in all life' (ibid., p.101). God's help is thus a personal help, help that allows persons to help themselves. This is the only kind of help that is truly helpful.

We have dwelt at some length on Oman's vigorous defence of human freedom because it is the background to his assertion that, in relation to divine omnipotence and omniscience, God's dealings with humanity cannot be by means of 'omnipotence directed by omniscience' (Oman, 1960, p.24). Oman conceives divine omnipotence as being personally persuasive rather than almightily coercive, over against traditional ways of conceiving it as God working in less than personal ways. He writes of 'the succour which has nothing of the might that constrains, but is all of the might which persuades; nothing of any proclamation of power, but is all of the difficult participation of love' (Oman, 1928, p.117). In a famous saying, Oman also affirms that 'God does not conduct his rivers like arrows to the sea' (Oman, 1960, p.25), by which, according to F.G. Healey, he means that the course of history plainly suggests that God has not worked with infallibilities and irresistible forces (Healey, 1965, p.47). Oman has thus reinterpreted divine omnipotence in terms of his personalist way of speaking about God: 'When one takes seriously the idea that God is personal, one can construct a doctrine of God which characterizes God as working indirectly in all of life within what can best be described as a parental love for the freedom of men and women' (Bevans, 1992, p.91). For Oman, then, God's is not a compulsive but a patiently persuasive power, taking human freedom utterly seriously. Divine omnipotence can therefore be best explained as God's power to be gracious. There can be no thought of opposing God's power and God's love, which would involve us in the conclusion that, in the face of the world's reality, either God can act but does not really care, or that God does care, but cannot act (ibid., p.94). God's power is precisely God's love.

This brings us to Oman's thought concerning prayer, which he sees as a moral means of grace adapted to moral ends. If it were otherwise it could not express God's gracious relation to human beings. As a means of forcing blessings out of God it would not, in any moral sense, be personal. Prayer is not pestering God for acts of omnipotence which otherwise God might refuse. Rather, prayer is 'the intercourse of the family of God, wherein our brethren are included as well as our Father'. Its primary task is 'in everything give thanks', so that 'though our needs do require special petitions, it is because … we need God's help, not because he forgets to be gracious until he is urged' (ibid., p.150).

This would seem to imply that Oman gives strong support to the view of petitionary prayer that sees it as a commitment to action, and as a way of seeking God's help to fulfil that commitment. He would certainly never have taken a view of prayer that sees it as a short cut to getting things done, for that would mean returning to the way of thinking about God's action as omnipotence directed by omniscience. That this is indeed the view of prayer taken by Oman finds support in two of his published sermons. In the first of these (Oman, 1921, pp.280ff) he raises the question of the necessity for prayer: 'If God is absolutely good and absolutely wise, if He knows all with absolute knowledge and does all with absolute power, where is there a place in his government for the interference of ignorant, erring, foolish mortals?' (ibid., pp.281f). This sermon, based on Luke 11:9, continues with Oman suggesting that if God deals with us as children then

prayer might actually be part of God's rule in the world. But if so, then we require a 'law of prayer' to which, according to Oman, there are three aspects: receiving, finding and discovery. Prayer, he says, is a way of preparing us to receive what God wishes to give us, so that through prayer our petitions are 'ennobled'. We need to ask truly in Christ's name so that our deepest desires, which Oman distinguishes from our wishes of the moment, may be satisfied. The prayer of asking, seeking and knocking appears thus to be a means of aligning ourselves more fully with the will of God rather than a way of getting God to do what we want.

The other sermon (Oman, 1950, pp.54–60), based upon the prayer of Christ in John 17, also argues for a view of prayer as aligning oneself with the will of God. Again, Oman warns against prayers that 'interfere with the general providence of God'. He speaks of the 'futility' of regarding prayer 'only as a means of altering the divine purpose'. Prayer, in fact, has to be submission to the divine purpose rather than opposition to it. Thus, according to Oman in this sermon, the task of prayer is 'the task of bringing human wills, our own and others', into complete harmony with the divine will'. This, however, is not resignation, but submission. It keeps divine omniscient love as its vision rather than divine power, for 'the grand end of all God's work is not power, but love'. Therefore 'we cannot have the right confidence towards God unless we are first seeking what God seeks for us'. Prayer, then, is a process by which the human will is purified. Oman concludes by saying that the true end of life is spiritual, not physical and that therefore 'the true confidence in prayer is in knowing that the highest thing we ask for is the thing that God has already granted to us'.

There is much that is true in all this. But, however much Oman argues passionately for a view of God as personal, a God of love who persuades rather than a God of power who coerces, it seems that he can find little room in his theology for a view of prayer in response to which God makes a difference to the world. The only difference prayer makes, it would seem according to Oman, is to the one who prays. The view of God as personal enables us to go far towards an understanding of intercessory prayer, but it is possible that much more can be said about prayer from within a personalist perspective than Oman is prepared to admit. We shall see this as we proceed to a consideration of the thought of H.H. Farmer, for whom changing a state of mind is as real an event as, for instance, changing the weather.

H.H. Farmer

Another twentieth-century British theologian who thought along similar lines to Oman is H.H. Farmer. The essence of Farmer's doctrine of God is that God is living personal Will who can only be known to be real in and through concrete historical situations and relationships where personal choices and decisions have to be made (Farmer, 1942, p.ix). Thus the living awareness of God as personal is something that happens in the sphere of the will. God, as the ultimate will, 'haunts the soul with the pressure of an unconditional value and the demand for unconditional obedience': God is 'unconditional demand and final succour' (Farmer, 1963,

p.29).[4] This infinitely personal God has created finite persons and is without exception interested in their highest good, part of which is that they should cooperate with God (Farmer, 1942, p.17).

In establishing his case, Farmer analyses the nature of personal relationship through which alone we become aware of persons as such. As with Buber's concept of the *I–Thou*, so also for Farmer persons are only to be spoken *to*, not spoken *about* (ibid., pp.33ff). A genuinely personal relationship between God and human beings also requires the real independence of the world. Such a world becomes the medium of God's communication with humans – it becomes God's *symbol*. Symbols are a method of communication which exchange meaning but which respect the frontiers of personality. Thus God cannot bring personal wills into harmony with the divine will by the exercise of *force majeure* alone. It is essential that human wills be able to refuse God's will. As Farmer says,

> It seems clear that if there is to be anything in the nature of genuine personal cooperation between men and God, then God's will must bring man's will into harmony with itself … by eliciting from man his own inner perception of its righteousness and his own spontaneous surrender to it in obedience and trust. (Farmer, 1963, p.69)

Farmer's insight that what distinguishes a person is that we do not seek to manipulate the will, but rather appeal to it through its own insight and consent (ibid., p.70), will become a very important point for an understanding of intercessory prayer. No theory of prayer will suffice if it depends upon an element of coercion in the relations between God and human beings since God, although omnipotent, can only persuade.

However, before coming to the topic of prayer, Farmer deals with the concepts of providence and miracle, both of which he sees as being aspects of the awareness of God as personal. Thus the concept of providence also requires the thought of God as both final succour and absolute demand (ibid., p.89). The concept of miracle, however, is one in which the element of succour predominates over the element of demand (ibid., p.111) and, so far as it is concerned, Farmer asserts that 'the word comes to the lips with a maximum of spontaneity' in that relationship with God called prayer (ibid., p.116). He identifies, firstly, an awareness of crisis, need or threat, and of human helplessness; secondly, an explicit turning to God; and thirdly, an awareness of an ad hoc response by God in an event or combination of events which would not have taken place had there been no petition and had not God so acted (ibid., p.117). In particular, the first of these implies a recognition of forces at work which have a relative independence of God, otherwise it would not be possible to petition God about them (ibid., pp.117–18), and the second implies that God's will is determined by its activity in relation to my will and that it is not imprisoned within the mechanical necessities of the universe (ibid., p.118). Farmer also recognizes that for God to intervene at every time and place would be to contradict a truly personal relationship to God, just as much as a complete refusal to intervene at all. The essential personal quality of the awareness of miracle therefore requires that miracles be relatively rare (ibid., p.119).

Coming now to prayer in Farmer's thought (ibid., pp.122ff), we note firstly that he sees it as the central phenomenon of religion and based, as is also the concept of revelation, in the primordial religious awareness of God as personal. The one is God's active approach as personal to human beings; the other, an answering activity on the part of self-conscious human personality towards God. Furthermore, if prayer is the heart of religion, then petition is the heart of prayer. It has no meaning except as directed to a personal will. Petitionary prayer is profoundly involved in the personal relationship of God to human beings. It is this emphasis on the personal which enables us to counter both rejections and perversions of the concept of petitionary prayer. If God as personal is rejected then prayer becomes merely a cultivation of certain states of mind, which cannot be prayer in any justifiable use of the term.[5] Other objections include the idea that petition is childish and needs to be left behind; that petition is superfluous because God does not need to be told what we need or stirred into action, so that prayer then becomes merely a 'getting in tune with God'; that petition is impious because it rests on a notion of Deity that does not know its own mind; and that it is injurious to the moral and spiritual life, putting the self and not God at the centre (eudaemonism), and becoming a substitute for our own endeavours. Against such objections, Farmer argues that, rather than abandoning the notion of petitionary prayer, we must seek to cleanse and ennoble the concept. Petition can be at the heart and centre of prayer because it is the expression of a genuinely personal relationship with God. It is bound up with the status of humans as personal beings called to find their true maturity in the harmonizing of their will with God's. If this is so, then prayer must be more than a mere state of mind. Furthermore, it cannot be superfluous. The divine purpose is that petitionary prayer is indispensable to its realization; it is part of the soul's response to God's challenge and invitation to become *through* cooperation with God a personality more and more fitted *for* cooperation with God.

For Farmer the charge of eudaemonism is a serious one. There is a real danger in prayer of making God the servant of our desires. However, there is a proper eudaemonistic element to prayer because it is an expression of an awareness of God as final succour. The perversion creeps in when this is separated from the awareness of God as absolute demand. In addition, Farmer points out that the reduction of prayer to mystical states of mind can also be eudaemonistic. The point, therefore, is not to eliminate the eudaemonistic element from prayer but to cleanse and elevate it. Again, the possibility that prayer can become a substitute for our own endeavours also arises from the isolation of the sense of God as succour from the sense of God as demand. Petitionary prayer, according to Farmer, is in fact more compatible with active endeavour than the attitude of mind which has no place for it. Farmer is also aware of the problems concerned with miracle seen as an event or combination of events that would not have taken place had God not been petitioned. He points out, however, that the compromise of praying only for the right attitude to external events is only a subterfuge and does not meet the difficulty. As we have already noted, Farmer considers that changing mental attitudes is as much an event as changing the weather.

Farmer's continuing discussion of the topic of miracle contains some further ideas that are germane to our enquiry into the nature of prayer. In particular, he expresses a liking for Leibniz' theory of monads in which nature becomes the expression of an infinite number of entities of a psychical kind in continuous interplay with one another (Farmer, 1963, p.161). This avoids monism and gives nature a relative independence *vis-à-vis* God. It also gives to theism a touch of deism and appears, moreover, to anticipate the pan-psychism of some process theologians, to whose thought we will come in a later chapter.[6] According to Farmer, these entities and their relationships to God and to one another are the ultimates of the real world, and through them the process continues. Their activity belongs to the 'creative present', where prayer also belongs, within the inner 'will-side' of events underlying the phenomenal world. Prayer is thus

> a relation of the will of man to the will of God, and, through the will of God, to all living creativeness of nature. At its highest it is the throwing of the whole personality into the creativeness of God. It is not merely man accepting God's will, but his endeavour to fulfil the place for which he has been created, the place, that is, of a personal fellow-worker with God. (Ibid., p.166)

Therefore, when humans enter into a right type of prayer relationship with God, God may initiate events through the rapport God has with all creatures. Prayer does make a real difference to the world. This, too, is a point taken up and developed within process thought.

In a later chapter in *The World and God*, Farmer continues his discussion of prayer (ibid., pp.236–44). Here he is concerned with the believer who consciously cooperates with God and who, says Farmer, has moved from the status of an unwitting instrument to that of a discerning agent of God's will. Through such cooperation, God is able to 'get a purchase on the human scene in a way not otherwise possible' (ibid., p.236).[7] For Farmer, prayer is one of the two main ways in which this active cooperation with God is manifested. Such prayer will focus upon the will of God and will be preoccupied with the furtherance of God's saving and reconciling work in the world. It is thus released from preoccupation with the self, but not from involvement in those 'purposes and interests through which alone personal life in this world can be expressed'. Love requires both prayer for and the active help of those in need: 'Whatever the spirit of love insists I should try to do in the lives of my fellows, that I must pray for; whatever the spirit of love insists that I should pray for, that, so far as I have any power, I must try to do' (ibid., p.238).

If petitionary prayer is thus looked upon as cooperation with 'the transcendent will of God which is none the less immanently at work in and through men's relationships with one another' (ibid., p.239), there are some important consequences. Firstly, this kind of prayer requires an imaginative attempt to empathize with the person who is being prayed for. Secondly, it throws light on the problem of unanswered prayer because it suggests that there may be other elements in the total situation which helped to determine the outcome. These other elements are not outside the knowledge and grasp of divine providence, but our prayer may

yet have played its part, together with them, in the outworking of God's purpose (ibid.). Next, it indicates the value of corporate prayer, which Farmer sees as an extension and deepening of fellowship, and not as a question of 'more prayer-pressure per square inch' (ibid., p.240). Instead, corporate prayer involves more people in an active cooperation with the will of God. Fourthly, it clarifies the conditions governing prayer for the success of the petitioner's own enterprises, which must be related to the work of God in the world for such prayer to be valid.[8] Finally, as to the limits of prayer, Farmer is content to leave that to the religious insight that is progressively conformed to the will of God. It is not for science to determine such limits, which are defined, rather, by the divine purpose of fashioning human personalities in love. So, it might be said to be a question of 'love God and pray what you like' (ibid., pp.242–3).

How are we to assess Farmer's thought in these matters? In the judgment of some he was a theist of a somewhat old-fashioned kind. F.G. Healey quotes Stephen Neill, who accuses Farmer of being out of date (Healey, 1966, p.22). His thought might not stand the challenge of linguistic analysis and logical positivism, although this might not be the final criterion for a judgment of the validity of Farmer's ideas. Against this, we must remember that Farmer was not chiefly engaged in the field of philosophical theology, but rather in the field of systematic theology in both its apologetic and dogmatic tasks. Healey also quotes C.B. Martin (1959), who criticizes Farmer's confidence in a direct apprehension of God as a unique and incommunicable way of knowing. Farmer would say that it is unique because of the uniqueness of what is apprehended and that it is incommunicable because the apprehending must in the case of each person be that person's own. Healey's book also includes an essay by I.T. Ramsey in which he provides a justification of talking about the personality of God (Healey, 1966, pp.56ff). Such talk, claims Ramsey, is grounded in those cosmic disclosures which are modelled in terms of reciprocity and which are characterized by mutual activity. Such disclosures give rise to personally structured discourse which enables us to talk most consistently about grace, prayer, providence and miracle. Furthermore, it is reasonable to suppose that these cosmic disclosures present us with a single individuation, God. But personal models are not the only ones available to us. To talk adequately of what confronts us in this single individuation may need non-personal models as well as personal ones.

We cannot altogether eliminate the sense of mystery from Farmer's view of God as 'absolute demand and final succour'. The experience of God for Farmer is unlike any other experience. There are reasons for faith, but in the end faith must rest upon revelation. This sense of the otherness of God is important for Farmer in his understanding of prayer. Like other members of the personalist school of theology, he agrees that 'prayer lets God into a situation in a way that was not otherwise possible' (Farmer, 1963, p.241). But Farmer is also willing to go further than some of his fellow personalists and to allow that, in response to prayer, God may effect some change in the material order of the world.

To sum up, then, Farmer's world is one that is grounded in God and is a world of persons. Corporate prayer may be more effective because it is an embodying of

this kind of personal world. What makes prayer possible is that the world is amenable to personal life. We pray precisely because we are persons.

Personalists of the American School

The American personalist school formed part of the movement of religious liberalism. Kenneth Cauthen identifies the essence of this liberalism as being a world-view tending towards monism, in which God is seen as an immanent purposive power at work within nature and history (Cauthen, 1962, pp.209f). This provides us with an organic model of the world with God as its Soul. The goal towards which God is working is the perfection of human moral responsibility through the establishment of the rule of love. Human beings are moral personalities who have emerged out of nature and know God in their own personal experience. This concern for personality and its development is central to the liberal outlook. Liberal thinkers make personal experience prior to theology, which they see as not so much a description of God's redemptive activity as an elaboration of the human experience of God. Their emphasis is therefore much more upon religion than it is upon God (ibid., p.110).

American personalism can be traced back to B.P. Bowne (1847–1910) who saw reality as a system of persons related through God as the supreme Person, with the world serving as a training ground for personal existence (Macquarrie, 1981, p.65). E.S. Brightman (1884–1953) started from the same position as Bowne, namely that the fact of personality can only be accounted for on the supposition that there is a cosmic creative Person. But Brightman modified traditional theistic doctrine in one important respect: he saw God, supremely active and personal, as being limited and finite (ibid., p.67). A.C. Knudsen is another American personalist who believed personalism to be the most satisfactory metaphysical foundation for Christianity. He saw the metaphysical absolute of a supreme, intelligent, purposive Person as the causal ground of the world and the creator of other persons as identical with the God of religion. Knudsen puts great stress upon the personality of God, such an emphasis being related to liberalism's faith in human beings as the clue to God. The concept of humans as moral personalities leads to the concept of God as a Person. But God is unlike human beings in not needing constantly to adjust to the environment. God thinks, feels and wills, but these activities are not limited, as in humans. Because personality also involves social realities as well as distinct individuality, Knudsen saw fellowship between human beings and God as necessary for God's full self-expression and self-realization (Cauthen, 1962, p.114). He also believed that the essential Christian view of the world is that it is basically good, although in need of redemption. The natural order is dependent upon God and is adaptable to the ends God has in view. So far as miracle is concerned, Cauthen cites Knudsen as an example of the tendency to posit a God who is active everywhere and in all things, and not simply or primarily in isolated cases of supernatural intervention (ibid., p.116).

According to Cauthen, among the strengths of liberalism are its strong emphasis upon the authority of personal experience of God, its sense of the concern of God

for the whole of life, its insistence upon the legitimacy of reason and moral feeling, and its recognition of the dynamic nature of history: ‘History is the locus of the encounter between a free, sovereign God and free, finite persons. The fundamental content of history is made as God and men mutually act and respond to each other as time moves’ (ibid., p.219). Nevertheless, from his neo-orthodox standpoint, Cauthen judges that the overall understanding of reality which informed liberalism is faulty. The fundamental error is that the notion of an immanent Spirit at work, gradually imparting order to nature and, by means of an evolutionary process, bringing human beings to moral and spiritual perfection within history, is too simple a version of the relationship between humans, the world and God (ibid., p.222). Liberalism understood neither the freedom of God as a person, nor the freedom of human beings as persons. Consequently, it did not understand adequately the relationship between God and history. Cauthen wants more emphasis on revelation, understood in personal rather than propositional terms, rather than on reason and experience. He believes that God can only be known in a personal encounter with human beings (ibid., p.224).

We must now turn to the topic of prayer in the thought of American personalists, beginning with H.E. Fosdick. Cauthen describes Fosdick’s approach as that of ‘personality-centered Christianity’ (ibid., pp.61ff). His was a version of the ethico-social form of evangelical liberalism. However, Fosdick was first and foremost not a theologian but a preacher whose concern was to communicate a practical form of Christianity. It is of interest to the present author that Fosdick was a Baptist. Cauthen comments that Baptists made a significant contribution to the development of religious liberalism in America and attributes this to the Baptist stress on the freedom of conscience,[9] as well as to the influence of revivalism where the emphasis was on the authority of personal experience rather than correctness of belief (ibid., p.62). However, it should be pointed out that the majority of Baptists in America did not follow the liberal road.

Fosdick subscribed to the supremely important principle of liberalism, which was the development of personality, which has infinite worth and is the key to the understanding of all life. The role of theology is to formulate, clarify and interpret religious experience. Since God is known best in the highest human experience of spiritual values within personal life, God must be symbolized in personal terms. Fosdick, therefore, defends a doctrine of a personal God who can be experienced everywhere, supremely through the personal. We can sum up his doctrine of God by saying that in its essence it conceives of ultimate reality as personal, spiritual and Christ-like (ibid., p.73). Cauthen summarizes Fosdick’s position in these words: ‘Religion within the Christian context consists of devotion to spiritual values conceived in terms of enrichment to personality, involves belief in a Conserver of values pictured by personality at its best, and issues in communion with an unseen Friend which will last forever’ (ibid., p.65). According to Cauthen, Fosdick sees the supreme task of the Church as opposing whatever hinders the development of personality and furthering whatever brings about the fullest expression of personal life, in the light of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. One of those activities is prayer.

Fosdick's thinking about prayer is mainly contained in *The Meaning of Prayer*, first published in 1915. This book is written partly as a practical devotional guide with daily readings and comment, but each section nevertheless concludes with some theological reflection. In this book, Fosdick sees prayer first and foremost as a means of communion with God; as a means of getting things done, it is almost bound to disappoint. However, Fosdick refuses to take the reductionist view of prayer as no more than an exercise in self-improvement:

> How many today think thus of prayer as a form of spiritual gymnastics? . . . They lift the dumb-bell of intercessory prayer, not because they think it helps their friends, but because it strengthens the fibre of their own sympathy. They lift the dumb-bell of prayer for strength in temptation not because God helps them, but because the act itself steadies them. Prayer to them is one form of menticulture. But this kind of prayer is not likely to persist long. (Fosdick, 1960, p.42)

Such an exercise may be called meditation or a 'soliloquy', but it is not prayer. The heart of prayer is communion with God, which is not to deny the important place petition may have within it. It is in this communion that God becomes real to the one who prays. Thus the practice of prayer is necessary to make God, not merely an idea held in the mind, but a Presence recognized in the life. It is not that people do not pray because God is not real to them; it is that God is not real because they do not pray (ibid., p.48).

Fosdick goes on to address the problem of prayer and the goodness of God. Why should we have to pray to such a God? If God knows what we need, why ask? Fosdick's reply to such questions is to assert that, although prayer cannot change God's purpose, it may yet release it. It is a form of human cooperation with God whereby what God wants, but cannot be done until humans pray for it, is done (ibid., p.80). Fosdick adds, in a way anticipatory of Eleonore Stump's relational growth argument and Brümmer's distinction between God's merely bringing things about and giving things in a personal way, that gifts must be taken or else they cannot be given. Fosdick's personalism also comes out in his discussion of prayer and natural law (ibid., pp.121–31). He suggests that, rather than the world being governed by law, it is governed by God according to law. Moreover, in the hands of personality, law-abiding forces can be made the servants of personal will. If this is true for humans then a fortiori it must be true for God. Being personal, God is able to control universal forces to serve personal ends. Providence is possible because God is the immanent, indwelling presence in the world, but because events cannot be completely isolated the power of prayer to affect the objective processes of nature is incapable of scientific demonstration. However, we need not be hesitant about expecting answers to prayer in the area of personal relationships where new laws are at work: 'In this higher realm where men deal with one another and with God, there are conditions of communion, laws of fellowship and prayer . . . personal relationship is the unique realm of prayer' (ibid., p.131).

Fosdick thus sees intercession as using the creative power of personality to open ways for God to work God's will (ibid., p.215). It is not a way of persuading a

reluctant God, but rather a way in which God waits for our cooperation. The foundation of intercession is the belief that God and the intimate relationships which make up the world form an organic whole. If we are thus members of one another and if God is the one in whom we live and move and have our being, then there is a basis for believing in the possibility that prayer may open ways of personal influence even at a distance: 'It may be … that God has so ordained the laws of human interrelationship that we can help one another not alone by our deeds but also directly by our *thoughts*, and that earnest prayer may be the exercise of this power in its highest terms' (ibid., p.220).

We return now to the thought of E.S. Brightman. There are a few pages devoted to the subject of prayer in his book *A Philosophy of Religion*, in which he suggests that our idea of prayer depends on our idea of God. An impersonalist view of God leads to prayer becoming no more than a 'dramatization' of meditation. In such a case, to use the 'Thou' form of address to God is illusory. Brightman rejects this view, and takes instead the theistic view of prayer as communion with God (Brightman, n.d., p.234). He believes in the possibility of petition for physical things, which he does not think of as materialistic or irreligious, because the physical may be desires as 'an instrument for the development of spiritual values'. What makes for the validity of such prayer is the 'immanence of God in all nature' (ibid.). Furthermore, petition for personal spiritual values is neither selfish nor weak, but it can be honest only when those who pray have exerted to the utmost their wills to achieve spiritual value. In any case, according to Brightman, there is no act of our will that does not to some extent involve the cooperation of other wills, both human and divine (ibid., p.235).

Brightman calls intercessory prayer 'prayer with a definitely social purpose'. Although it may become a substitute for – or even a deterrent to – social action, intercession can also be an effective supplement to such action, securing 'divine cooperation in our social endeavours and divine action in cases where we are helpless to act'. But if we abandon this principle of cooperation, the prayer becomes magical and irreligious. Such prayer also depends for its effectiveness on the cooperation of those prayed for as well as that of those who pray. This comes out in Brightman's reply to the objection that it is unjust for persons who are the objects of prayer to receive spiritual benefits without any effort of their own. Brightman points out that in fact every individual receives benefits through the social process without effort, but he goes on to emphasize that no truly spiritual benefit can come to those prayed for unless they themselves avail themselves of new opportunities for spiritual growth provided for them by God in response to the prayers of others (ibid., p.236). This view, as we shall see in a later chapter, appears to correspond to the ideas of process theologians when they speak of God presenting possibilities to creatures that they may choose to actualize or not.

The possibility of intercessory prayer, then, according to Brightman, depends upon the existence of a cosmic social process. It is striking, however, that he speaks of intercession almost entirely in terms of the spiritual benefits it brings to those who are prayed for. He sees God's purpose as seeking to elicit free spiritual effort

from human beings and to encourage cooperative personal relations between them, and between them and God (ibid.). As for the objection that prayers appear to infringe the laws of nature, Brightman points out that these so-called laws are statements of what takes place when purpose does not interfere. If human persons are able to express their purposes in a universe of law then a fortiori God is able to do so. Brightman here appears to be in agreement with Fosdick. It would also appear from all this that Brightman advocates a view of prayer as a cooperation of our wills with the will of God. It is more than a mere alignment of our wills with God's will. He sees prayer as operating within an overall and cosmic social process. Prayer creates a situation in which a good (though finite) God can do what is not possible in the absence of the prayer (ibid., p.237).

To sum up this discussion of the contributions of American personalists to an understanding of petitionary and intercessory prayer, it appears that they emphasize the immanence of God within the creation more fully than their British counterparts. They speak of a cosmic social process through which a personal God is at work. Human persons are all related to God within this process, and one expression of this relationship is prayer. There also appears to be a tendency within American personalism to rate spiritual values more highly than material ones. Prayer for material things can then be justified only in so far as it serves those higher spiritual values. Prayer above all promotes the development of personality, and petition and intercession become a means of God acting through the cooperation of human wills with the divine. This cooperation is necessary not only in the one who prays, but also in those who are prayed for if the prayer is to become effective for them. T.F. Hewitt (1969) believes that Fosdick is an example of those who promote a view of intercessory prayer as restricting God's response to the actions of people in whom God works, so that answers to prayer are channelled through the one who prays. On the other hand, we saw earlier[10] that Fosdick does allow that prayer may be a means whereby personal influence operates at a distance, so Hewitt's judgment here appears to be questionable. As for Fosdick's belief that prayer allows God to do what would not otherwise be possible, and to act in response to human openness to the divine, Hewitt thinks this limits God's effective action to the subjective realm alone and tends to identify God with the world process. Fosdick thus assumes too easily that this is the best of all possible worlds. Such judgments, it would seem, could be made more generally in connection with the American personalist thinkers we have been considering. Nevertheless, there is much that is of value in the view of these thinkers. Despite Hewitt's judgment above, it is important to retain the view that God does often answer intercessory prayer through the person who prays, who is prompted by God through the personal relationship constituted by prayer to act on behalf of those prayed for. It is also reasonable to expect answers to prayer to take place mostly at the level of mind or spirit, because it is at these levels that personality is expressed most clearly. But this does not rule out the possibility of God acting in response to prayer to change things at the material level.

It is time now to provide some philosophical grounding to personalist theological thought, particularly to the concept of human persons being linked

together with God in some sort of organic or cosmic whole. We shall do this through an examination of the ideas of John Macmurray.

John Macmurray: the 'Form of the Personal'

Like Oman, Farmer and the American personalists, John Macmurray also takes the view that the self is a person and that personal existence is constituted by the relation of persons. In his Gifford Lectures of 1953–4, Macmurray seeks to provide a philosophical grounding for such a claim (Macmurray, 1957, 1961). We shall look in Macmurray's thought for a metaphysical foundation for that personal relationship with God that is expressed in prayer. To that end, we must first summarize Macmurray's argument.

Macmurray considered that the 'form of the personal' was the 'emergent problem' for the philosophy of his day. His view, shared by many contemporary thinkers, was that the traditional methods of philosophy had proved themselves incapable of solving the problems which had led to the breakdown of its tradition. Logical positivism, he claimed, discarded the problems in order to maintain the method, while existentialism relinquished the method in wrestling with the problems: 'Existentialism has discovered, with sensitiveness of feeling, that the philosophical problem of the present lies in a crisis of the personal: logical positivism recognizes it as a crisis of logical form and method. Both are correct, and both are one-sided' (Macmurray, 1957, p.29).

Macmurray seeks to overcome the problems of dualism by conceiving the Self not as subject (a knower) but rather as agent (a doer). He suggests that the isolated, purely individual self is a fiction. The unity of the personal cannot be thought of as the form of an individual self, but only through the mutuality of personal relationship (ibid., p.38). In seeking to establish this claim Macmurray enters into a lengthy dialogue with Kant whose critical philosophy he regards as being the most adequate of modern philosophies (ibid., pp.39ff). But Kant's philosophy fails to do justice to that aspect of human experience of which religion is the reflective expression. Macmurray thinks that Kant treats religion simply as a set of beliefs which are justifiable pragmatically in so far as they tend to support the rational will, with the result that in Kant's thought religion becomes no more than a sop to the weakness of human nature or a crutch to aid the feebleness of our all too human wills (ibid., p.70). In Macmurray's judgment, it was the adoption of the 'I think' as the centre and reference point of Kant's philosophy which made it formally impossible to do justice to religious experience. Kant conceives God as the supreme object of thought, and the knowledge of God the determination of this object by means of the categories of the understanding. But this misses the point of religious experience for which the idea of God is the idea of a universal Thou to which all persons stand in personal relation (ibid., pp.71–2). Not only does Kant's critical philosophy fail to do justice to the religious experience of relationship with God, it also fails to do justice, or even allow for, the possibility of our knowledge of one another. This failure arises because its formal conception

of knowledge excludes the possibility by postulating the 'I think' as the primary presupposition of all experience (ibid., p.73).

Macmurray's solution to these problems is to reject the dualism of mind and matter and to start from the primacy of the practical. Dualism arose when the Self was defined as a thinker, and it followed because the theoretical was made primary. But when experience is divided into the theoretical and the practical it then becomes impossible to conceive of the unity of the Self. So Macmurray replaces the 'I think' with an 'I do', the consequence of which exchange is that the dualism between theory and action disappears. The primary knowledge now becomes the knowledge that arises in action, which is an activity of the Self that (unlike thinking) employs all our capacities. It is only persons who can 'act' (ibid., pp.84–8).

Thus, for Macmurray, the Self is Agent, a doer rather than a thinker. If it should be asked how we know this, the reply is that this is a question that could only be asked from the dualistic standpoint of the Self as subject. In fact, we must know that we are performing our own acts. Ours is a 'knowledge in action'. Furthermore, when the Self acts, it modifies the world, implying that the Self is part of the world in which it acts, whereas the Self as subject stands over against the world which is its object, and so is not part of the world it knows. The Self can only exist as agent, not as subject (ibid., pp.90f). But how does the Self become aware of existents other than itself? From the standpoint of idealism (the 'I think') there is no way from thought to existence, so that ultimately we are reduced to solipsism. Realism also is sheer dogma and provides no evidence for the independent existence of the object.

From the standpoint of the Agent, however, the case is different. Here Macmurray considers sense perception and concludes that touch is prior to sight. The importance of this is that, while sight operates at a distance, tactual perception is necessarily perception in action which modifies the object. The core of such perception is the experience of resistance: the Agent is prevented from achieving his intentions, his will is frustrated. So Macmurray comes to his crucial conclusion that we become aware of the Other in its resistance to our action, and we become aware of ourselves as that which resists the Other. Indeed, without such resistance no action is possible. The very important corollary to this insight is that personal experience is experience that includes and is constituted by its own negative, because the Other in its resistance to the Self's action appears as the negation of the Self. Furthermore, it is through this resistance to our action that we characterize the Other as an agent like ourselves (ibid., pp.106–10). All human knowledge is necessarily anthropomorphic because we can only determine the behaviour of the Other through a knowledge of our own. As Macmurray says, 'I must attribute to the Other, if I am to understand it, the form of activity I attribute to myself' (ibid., p.116).[11]

Macmurray defines action as a unity of movement and knowledge. It is not, as in dualism, a cognition which is the cause of a movement. He puts the point like this: 'When there is an acting there is a moving and a knowing, and the indivisible unity of these constitutes the acting' (ibid., p.128). In action the Agent generates a

past by actualizing a possibility. To act is to determine the future; the past is that which has been determined. To possess freewill is to be able to determine the indeterminate, that is, the future. But determining the future determines an environment which itself provides a limitation to further action (ibid., p.135). This means that action is the choice of one possibility which negates the possibility of all the others, which thus become past possibilities and so no longer actually possible.

While denying that in his argument he is presenting a philosophical system (ibid., p.203), Macmurray does, perhaps, point to the necessity of such a system to undergird in a coherent way religious discourse. He asserts that the doctrine that metaphysical statements are meaningless has its roots in the positivistic attitude of critical philosophy which he has rejected. The rejection of metaphysics only seems justified from the standpoint of the primacy of the theoretical, because then metaphysical statements need verification and from that standpoint they cannot be verified (ibid., pp.214f). But when the 'I do' has been substituted for the 'I think', the possibility of metaphysics remains an open question. In Macmurray's thought the verification of metaphysical statements is by reference to action, not sense perception. A theory must be tested in terms of the difference it makes to the intentionality of an agent. In fact, metaphysical beliefs do make a profound difference to the direction of human intentions. When a person acts upon beliefs, the consequences of such action constitute the verification of the belief. For Macmurray, the heart of such verification must be the effect of the belief upon the relation of persons.

The particular metaphysical assertion that Macmurray wishes to affirm is that the world is one action (ibid., p.217). To think of the Self as Agent is to think of the unity of the world as a unity of action. Macmurray's terminology seems important here. He wishes to distinguish what is done (action) from what merely happens (process) (ibid., p.219). If the world is merely process then it cannot include action in the unity it seeks to express. The world as a unitary *process* must be a world in which nothing is ever *done*, in which everything simply *happens*; that is, a world in which nothing is intended. We must consider that what appears as a process of events which happen in necessary succession may always be part or an aspect of an action. To think of the unity of the world as one action is to think of it as informed by a unifying intention. The conflict between religion and atheism thus turns on the issue of whether the process of the world is intentional or not. The theistic alternative issues in the hope of an ultimate unity of persons in fellowship which gives meaning to human effort. Thus, according to Macmurray, the argument which starts from the primacy of the practical moves steadily in the direction of a belief in God.

The second volume of Macmurray's Gifford Lectures begins with a reiteration of the importance of persons and personal relationships. It is because the centre of reference has been transferred from human beings as thinkers to human beings as agents that they become fully personal. Thus the isolation of the 'thinking' self is overcome. Human beings are set firmly in the world which they know, and are restored to their proper existence as a community of persons in relation. This

personal relation of persons is what constitutes personal existence: ‘there can be no man until there are at least two men in communication’ (Macmurray, 1961, p.12). Macmurray sums up his thesis by saying: ‘The Self *exists* only as Agent, and is constituted by its relation to the Other; it has its being in its relationship and this relationship is necessarily personal’ (ibid., p.17). He adds that the Other in this personal relationship must also be personal, since persons are constituted by their mutual relation. The ‘I’ exists only as one element in the complex ‘You and I’ (ibid., p.24). We can know other persons as persons only by entering into a personal relationship with them. Macmurray also expresses a preference for the term ‘person’ rather than that of ‘personality’. This latter term has come to mean ‘personal individuality’, so stressing the element of difference between persons rather than what they have in common. He also wishes to distinguish the knowledge of persons as persons and the knowledge of persons as objects. The first of these depends upon and expresses a personal attitude to the other person. It regards the other as a free agent. The second reflects an impersonal attitude, assuming that human behaviour follows determined patterns. However, the norm for all personal relations is the personal relationship of persons, and is always right. Impersonal relationships require to be justified, and are so only when subordinated to the personal (ibid., pp.30–37).

Macmurray seeks to illustrate his thought in this regard by analysing the relationship between mother and child. His analysis supports the contention that the unit of personal existence is not the individual but two persons in relation, the ‘You and I’. We are persons not by individual right, but by virtue of our relation to one another. Human experience is shared experience; human life is a shared life; and human behaviour carries a reference to the personal Other (ibid., p.61).

Next, Macmurray investigates the development of the person as it learns to discriminate the Other into persons, organisms and material objects. What distinguishes a non-personal relation is that it lacks the mutuality of a personal relation. The Other in this instance does not respond to my call. It can be moved, but it cannot move itself. In action, the non-personal is always means and never agent (ibid., pp.81f). In the course of the argument Macmurray brings out the bipolar nature of personal motivation (ibid., pp.66–71). The positive pole is love; the negative, fear. These motives operate in all personal action. Even the most positive action must contain an element of the negative if it is not to be completely thoughtless and reckless. Nor can any action be motivated entirely by fear, as a totally negative motivation would inhibit action totally. However, Macmurray also derives a third motive from the interrelation of this positive and negative in the personal situation. Hatred, originating from the frustration of love by fear, is a universal component in the relation of persons. It is inevitable because it is impossible that the Other should always respond to me in the way my action expects. Macmurray sees hatred as an original and necessary motive in the constitution of the personal and as that which theology refers to as original sin (ibid., pp.73–5).

Macmurray continues by examining the rhythm of withdrawal and return by which we learn to know the Other as the repetition of the same. This rhythm

constitutes not only the universal and necessary pattern of personal development (which is the development of the individual person in relation to the Other), but also the unity of personal experience (ibid., pp.87–90). This brings him to a discussion of the Will, which implies a self-assertion against the Other as an opposition to be overcome. It also implies an awareness of the Self as opposed to the Other. Out of this contradiction there arises in reflection the distinction between good and bad, true and false. The moral struggle is thus primarily a struggle between persons. It is only secondarily a struggle within the individual. From this conflict of agents are derived all the characteristic dichotomies (real/unreal, good/evil, right/wrong, true/false) in terms of which human life must be lived and in which they are contained. We are compelled to distinguish and choose (ibid., pp.95–8). This leads Macmurray to a discussion of morality and its modes. Morality presupposes intention, and intention requires a selective attention relative to the interest of the agent. Macmurray calls this selective intention 'apperception' (ibid., p.111). The universal dispositions of love, fear and hatred determine the way in which we apperceive the Other in action and to that extent determine the form of our action. Corresponding to these three universal dispositions there are three distinguishable modes of morality: communal, submissive and aggressive. Only the first of these is positive. It is heterocentric, meaning that to act rightly is to act for the sake of the Other and not oneself (ibid., pp.121f).

Now follows an investigation into community and society. Human society is a unity of persons because we are participants in and not just spectators of human activity (ibid., p.129). Macmurray detects a difference between 'society' and 'community'. Every community is a society, but not every society is a community. A community is based upon a positive personal motivation: 'Members of a community are in communion with one another and their association is a fellowship' (ibid., p.146). Therefore communion is to be celebrated. This brings Macmurray to a discussion of the nature of religion, which he describes as a form of reflective activity, the origin of which is to be found in the structure of universal human experience. Any theory of religion, he says, must account for four facts: its universality in human society; that it has no analogue even in the highest forms of animal life, so that religion is bound up with that which makes us persons; that religion has been the matrix from which all the various aspects of culture and civilization have crystallized; and that it is inclusive of all the members of the society to which it refers, and depends upon their active cooperation for its constitution (ibid., p.156). These facts suggest that religion must be concerned with the basic problem of human existence, the relation of persons. A community of persons can only be sustained by mutual affection. It must in principle be inclusive. But there is the problem of subordinating the negative motivation to the positive so that the network of positive personal relationship which constitutes a community can be maintained. Religion is the form of reflection which relates to this problem. It expresses the consciousness of community, and is the celebration of communion. As such it must be something in which all members of the community share. It cannot be a solitary or private reflection. So religion is a means of strengthening the will to community and of overcoming the motives that

work against it (ibid., p.157–63). But it is impossible to represent in religious symbolism the unity of a community of persons without the idea of a universal and personal Other who stands in the same mutual relationship to every member of the community; that is, a universal Agent. When this idea of a universal Agent is fully developed, we reach the idea of God (ibid., p.164).

According to Macmurray religion also has a redemptive function in overcoming not only fear of one's fellows but also fear of Nature (that is, a fear of Death). Furthermore, religious reflection arises out of a failure in personal relationship, and its function is to understand the reason for this failure so that the relationship may be resumed in a way that will avoid its failure in the future. Such an understanding can be reached through the idea of a universal Person to whom all personal agents stand in an identical relation (ibid., pp.168f). Thus, at the end of a long enquiry, Macmurray comes to the climax of his argument: that the nature of the universe is that it is a personal universe. The community of persons in relation can act only through the Other, which is both its support and its resistance. This Other is the world of which the community of agents is only a part. We must therefore conceive it through the form of the personal so that the universe is indeed seen as a personal universe. From the standpoint of the agent the question whether God exists must be translated into the question whether the world is personal. The theological question must be represented as 'Is what exists personal?'; 'Is the universal Other a personal or an impersonal Other?' These questions must be referred to action so that verification of belief in God is to be found in a way of life (ibid., pp.214–15). Macmurray concludes by repeating his assertion that there can indeed be only one way to think our relation to the world – as a personal relation. The world as one action is therefore to be conceived as the act of God, the Creator, and ourselves as created agents. Since agents, though immanent in their actions, necessarily transcend those actions, God as infinite Agent transcends the world which is God's act, but is also immanent within it. Nevertheless the verification of any particular religious belief can only be through persons who are prepared to commit themselves intentionally to the way of life it prescribes (ibid., p.223). Thus, by shifting our standpoint from the 'I think' to the 'I do', we have been driven to conceive of a personal universe in which God is the ultimate reality (ibid., p.224).

Macmurray's ideas, prima facie, appear to have much relevance to a conception of persons praying to a personal God. The language of agents, persons, community and communion sits comfortably with a notion of prayer as belonging to a personal relationship with God, the supreme and personal Other, who is seen as the ultimate reality of the universe and who stands in the same mutual relationship to all other persons who, in turn, discover their personhood through being members of a community of persons. As Macmurray says: 'we relate ourselves rightly to the world by entering into communion with God, and seeking to understand and to fulfil his intention' (ibid., p.217). One way of doing this is through prayer. In addition, Macmurray points out that the normal means of communication within a community is through language. This may suggest that, through prayer, language may have a part to play in our communion with God. Again, the concept of God as

supreme Agent to whom all persons stand in the same mutual relation allows us to conceive of a way for God to act in the lives of others in response to our prayers of intercession, which is one way in which we may relate in a personal way to other persons who may be separated from us by some distance. Such prayer is an expression of our being in community with them. Furthermore, Macmurray's insistence upon the communal nature of personal existence could point the way to an understanding of prayer as a corporate rather than as an individual activity.

There are affinities and parallels between the thought of Macmurray and the personalist theologians considered above. There is contact with the ideas of H.H. Farmer in Macmurray's claim that the possibility of action depends upon the other also being an agent (Macmurray, 1957, p.145), implying that the distinction between right and wrong depends upon a clash of wills. Farmer, as we saw, conceives the living awareness of God as personal as also happening in the sphere of the will. What Farmer describes as the rapport that God has with creatures also appears to be given partial philosophical support by Macmurray's notion of God as the supreme personal Other who stands in the same mutual relationship with all other persons.[12] Such a concept would also appear to parallel the ideas of those who belong to the school of process thought, to which we shall come in due course. But it would be important for us to distinguish between the way Macmurray uses the word 'process' and the way process theologians use it. It is possible that what Macmurray calls 'action' is what is meant by the process thinkers when they speak of 'process'. Macmurray's point[13] that action generates a past by actualizing one possibility to the exclusion of other possibilities, and thereby also determines the future, would also appear to make contact with process thought.

Praying to a Personal God

There is much that is attractive in a personalist approach to prayer. Whatever other conclusions may be reached as this enquiry proceeds, it will be necessary to retain the personal nature of the activity as part of an overall understanding of prayer. Not only are some of the problems concerning petitionary and intercessory prayer addressed when it is viewed in a personalist perspective, but such a context also makes possible a theologically satisfying interpretation of prayer and moves us towards an understanding of how prayer 'works'.

The personalist approach generally uses a 'from below to above' methodology. Even those, like H.H. Farmer, for instance, who accept that there are limits to this approach, and therefore also make an appeal to revelation,[14] begin from an analysis of experience. This theological method which begins with what is experienced of God's gracious action in the world is most clearly seen in the case of John Oman,[15] but it is also very much apparent in the thought of the American personalists and in the philosophical approach of John Macmurray. It is particularly our experience of being persons that personalist theology seeks to describe, clarify, interpret and apply to an understanding of the relationship between human beings and God. It is

also clear that a metaphysical basis for an understanding of reality can be argued for. In particular, John Macmurray's ordered thought and careful analysis of human experience led him to the conclusion that the universe is a personal universe in which the ultimate reality is God, the supreme and personal Other who stands in the same mutual personal relationship with all other persons.

But, as we have seen, Oman, Farmer and the Americans also in their own way support a similar view of the personal nature of reality. In such a universe God's action is conceived as being primarily through persons. In such a context, prayer can be seen as cooperation with this personal activity of God. In particular, the necessity for petitionary and intercessory prayer may be justified in terms of a relationship with God that is truly personal. The requirements of such a relationship, especially the requirements of freedom and the need to provide a safeguard against a regression to immaturity, mean that God may refrain from intervening in the life of an individual until asked. Asking is a condition for God to give us what we need in a personal way, in distinction from merely bringing it about.[16] This may be true even in the case of intercession for others, the effectiveness of which depends not only upon the conscious cooperation with God of the one who prays, but also upon the conscious or unconscious cooperation of the person prayed for. However, only in the case of conscious cooperation on the part of the one prayed for will God be able to give anything in a personal way as a result of the prayer of another.

The context of a personal relationship with God also requires a reinterpretation of the attributes of God, particularly divine omnipotence. Oman is surely right when he speaks of grace operating 'as a Father, not a force'. We can no longer conceive of God's action, in Oman's expression, as 'omnipotence guided by omniscience', or as Farmer's *force majeure*. Rather we must talk of personal persuasion rather than almighty coercion. A corollary of this is that the same condition must apply on the human side. Magical views of prayer must be ruled out. Any idea of prayer suggesting that God is compelled to answer the request as stated implies a less than personal relationship between the one who prays and God.[17] Be that as it may, many of the personalist thinkers we have considered suggest that prayer allows God to work in ways that may not have been possible before the prayer was made. In some respects, God may need human cooperation in order to carry out the divine will because it can only be done in ways that are personal. As we have just observed, such personal cooperation with God must be on the side of the prayed-for as well as the one who prays, since in order for the prayer to be effective the prayed-for must avail themselves of the new opportunities that God makes available to them through the prayers of others.[18] Petitionary and intercessory prayer may thus contribute to the making of history through the mutual personal interaction of human beings through the transcendent-immanent God who is present throughout the creation. Such a God, as we have seen, is one who stands in the same mutual relationship with all other persons, which suggests that through their communion with God individual human persons are related to other individual human persons, even those they do not know or who may live at a distance. This, in turn, suggests a mechanism for the effect of intercessory prayer

upon those who are prayed for. We may claim that prayer 'works' because all human persons are related to one another through relationship to a personal God, whether or not that relationship is acknowledged. There are also affinities here with the biblical concept of a network of prayer established by the ministry of the Holy Spirit.[19]

In spite of this, there seems to be some disagreement among personalist theologians on whether or not prayer affects the one who prays alone or other persons as well, or even the material world. Oman is one thinker who promotes a view of prayer as aligning oneself with the will of God and most strongly warns against prayers that seek to 'interfere with providence'.[20] Others, like Brümmer,[21] who would go further than this, would still wish to restrict God's action through prayer to the actions of those who pray, with the effect of making the person who prays the channel of God's action on behalf of those prayed for. While it is certainly important to affirm the unity of prayer and action, so that the former does not become a substitute for the latter, it is still not clear whether this amounts to anything more than a view of prayer as commitment to ethical endeavour. We have also noted the tendency among personalists, especially those from America, to exalt spiritual values over material ones and thus to see the benefits of prayer almost entirely in spiritual terms.[22] This may be a relic of the dualism that Macmurray rejects.

So can God bring about material changes through prayer? And does God in fact do so? Here we need to keep in mind Farmer's assertion that a change in a state of mind is just as real as any change in the external world. Farmer himself was certainly prepared to admit that prayer may become a means whereby a personal God influences the material creation, however rare such instances might be. And Farmer also came close to a theory of how this might happen with his concept of monads,[23] although both Fosdick and Brightman also see God's action on the material world as personal purpose working through natural law and not contrary to it. Another possibility is that God may effect changes in the material order through the cooperative action of persons who have been influenced, or persuaded, by God as a result of prayers offered either by these persons themselves or by others. This would be another application of the double agency theory of God's action in and on the world. Still, we should not rule out altogether the possibility of God acting directly upon the material creation, and particularly in response to human intercession.

This brings us, finally, to the points of contact between personalist thought and process theology. At several places in this chapter such points of contact have been noted. In a later chapter it will be argued that the insights of process thought may help to clarify the way in which prayer 'works' and also to overcome some of the problems for petitionary and intercessory prayer arising out of the traditional dualistic theistic context in which it is usually considered. Yet another chapter will give consideration to the providential activity of God, in view of the fact that, although we have spoken in this chapter of the possibility of God acting in the world in response to prayer, the question of how God so acts remains open. But first we must ask if God is even capable of responding to events in the world,

including prayer, given traditional ideas concerning divine impassibility and immutability.

Notes

1 Therapeutic meditation is the view that sees prayer only as a means of expressing concern for those in need, and/or of aligning oneself to the will of God, and/or of committing oneself to some kind of action on behalf of those prayed for.
2 See the discussion of the thought of H.H. Farmer below, p.51. Brümmer also refers to Farmer in connection with his discussion of the value of corporate prayer (Brümmer, 1984, p.58).
3 See Bevans (1992, p.69), Healey (1965, p.48).
4 See also Farmer (1942, p.52). The concept of God as absolute demand and final succour is the crux of Farmer's doctrine of God. His words about God 'haunting the soul with the pressure of an unconditional value' also seem to parallel the thought of theologians of the process school concerning God presenting to creatures a range of possibilities, one of which is to be regarded as being ideal. We shall come to such ideas in due course.
5 See the comments concerning 'therapeutic meditation' above, p.40.
6 L.S. Thornton is another writer who sees the affinity between Leibniz' monadology and the pan-psychism of process thinkers (Thornton, 1950, p.304, n.3).
7 In a footnote, Farmer (1963, p.236) cites Oman, *The Paradox of the World*, as his authority for this distinction between God's instruments and God's agents.
8 Farmer also suggests that it is through praying for our own enterprises that our motives may be cleansed and our ambitions ennobled (Farmer, 1963, p.241).
9 Baptists have no credal statements.
10 See p.55.
11 Macmurray also comments that this inevitable anthropomorphism may provide the justification of religious belief.
12 See p.50 above. However, Farmer's concept here may be better supported philosophically by process thought.
13 See p.59 above.
14 See p.51 above.
15 See p.44 above.
16 See p.42 above.
17 However, at p.144 below we discuss the possibility that process thought does conceive of the influence of the world upon God in an almost causal way.
18 See here, for instance, the thought of Brightman on p.55 above.
19 See pp.32–3 above.
20 See p.47 above.
21 See p.43 above.
22 See Brightman, p.55–6 above.
23 See p.50 above.

Chapter 4

Is God Capable of Answering Prayer?

To many readers the question posed in the title of this chapter may seem perplexing. It appears to contradict the many invitations to pray that are found in the Bible.[1] In particular, Jesus teaches that the Father is more ready to hear than we are sometimes ready to ask. It might be considered almost blasphemous to suggest that prayer is a sham because God might not be capable of response.

However, the issue cannot be settled quite as easily as that. It has already been suggested in the previous chapter that our concept of God may affect our view of what God is capable of doing, and the fact is that for most of Christian history theologians have conceived of God as untouched by influences external to the divine being. The traditional argument went something like this: any idea of change in God must be forbidden because the only change in God that might be allowed is for God to become more perfect, but this suggests that God was less than perfect before the change took place, and this is unacceptable because it contradicts the assertion that God is perfect. On the other hand, a fully perfect being who changed could only become less perfect through the change. The idea that God is capable of change appears thus to contradict the idea of God's perfection. It also used to be considered that God can only be the cause of anything and can never be caused to become or do anything. Such a God cannot be under any kind of constraint or necessity, is not able to feel emotion, or to experience suffering in any way. The technical terms that are used in this connection speak of God's 'impassibility' or 'immutability'.

Views such as these, however, raise problems for Christian belief and practice. If God cannot experience suffering, then what is the relation of the sufferings of Jesus on the cross to the being of God, if Jesus is the incarnation of the eternal Word of God, the second person of the Trinity? If God is impassible how can God be said to feel the pain of a broken world and be compassionate? Indeed, how can it be claimed that God is Love? It will be necessary to touch upon these issues in the course of this chapter, although obviously a full discussion is beyond its scope. In particular, however, these views about the nature of God also raise problems for the understanding and the practice of intercessory prayer. If the supposed purpose of intercession is to move God to act, how can an unchanging and unchangeable God respond to such petitions? An impassible God by definition cannot be so moved, in which case it would seem that petitionary and intercessory prayer is pointless unless, of course, we resort to the kind of reduction of prayer to therapeutic meditation that we have already rejected.[2] While it is probably the case that advocates of prayer as therapeutic meditation would not cite divine impassibility as the only or even the main reason for their views, it is nevertheless

clear that the image that is held of God does influence the way the prayer of intercession is understood. Since part of the traditional image is of an impassible God, it may prove possible to establish a coherent view of intercession as more than therapeutic meditation if we can find good reasons for modifying the doctrine of divine impassibility. In passing, it might also be added that the view of intercessory prayer as little more than a meditative exercise might imply a somewhat deistic view of God.

An illustration of the inconsistencies that arise when a strong view of divine impassibility is combined with a desire to pray for God's help is afforded by Anselm, the famous eleventh-century theologian, philosopher and Archbishop of Canterbury. Anselm's *Proslogion* begins with a strong and impassioned appeal for divine help in his theological enquiry. However, it is not long before Anselm makes a strong affirmation of the impassibility of God:

> But how are You at once both merciful and impassible? For if You are impassible, then You do not have any compassion; and if You have no compassion, Your heart is not sorrowful from compassion with the sorrowful, which is being what merciful is. But if You are not merciful, whence comes so much consolation for the sorrowful?
>
> How, then, are You merciful and not merciful, O Lord, unless it be that You are merciful in relation to us and not in relation to yourself? In fact, You are merciful according to our way of looking at things and not according to Your way. For when You look upon us in our misery it is we who feel the effect of Your mercy, but you do not experience the feeling. Therefore, You are both merciful because You save the sorrowful and pardon sinners against You; and You are not merciful because You do not experience any feeling of compassion for our misery. (Charlesworth, 1965, p.125)

There could hardly be a stronger statement of the impassibility of God than this, but it also demonstrates the problems, since Anselm is forced to assert the paradox that God is at the same time both merciful and not merciful; that God is compassionate, yet does not experience the feelings of compassion. Furthermore, in the prayer which begins his book, Anselm asks God for a definite response to his request for enlightenment:

> When will You give Yourself again to us? Look upon us, Lord; hear us, enlighten us, show yourself to us. Give Yourself to us that it may be well with us, for without You it goes so ill for us. Have pity on our efforts and our strivings towards You, for we can avail nothing without You ... I set out hungry to look for You; I beseech You, Lord, do not let me depart from You fasting. I come to You as one famished; do not let me go without food. Poor, I have come to one who is rich. Unfortunate, I have come to one who is merciful. Do not me return scorned and empty-handed ... Teach me to seek You, and reveal Yourself to me as I seek, because I can neither seek You if You do not teach me how, nor find You unless You reveal Yourself. (Ibid., p.115)

It is plain that the thought of this second quotation is at odds with the first. Here Anselm asks God for a definite answer to his request for enlightenment, but it is hard to see how an impassible God could feel and understand the need Anselm

expresses, let alone respond to the prayer. There seems to be a basic incompatibility between the beliefs that God is merciful and compassionate and willing to answer prayer and the belief that God is impassible. Citing these quotations from Anselm as an example of how a believer might affirm certain beliefs that appear to contradict some aspects of that believer's practice, David Pailin comments:

> Either his prayer expresses a wish for which Anselm can expect no reciprocal response in God – in which case it seems to be a rather pointless expression of a feeling of inadequacy – or Anselm's practice presupposes a responsiveness in God which his assertion of belief about God's impassibility cannot accommodate. (Pailin, 1990, pp.10–11)

In order, therefore, to reach a fuller understanding of the nature of intercessory prayer it would seem necessary to reconsider the doctrine of divine impassibility. One possibility is to recognize, in the words of David Pailin, that 'the divine perfection does not entail unchangeability in every respect'. On the other hand, we need also to recognize that there are elements of truth in the doctrine of divine impassibility which need to be retained. One argument that we shall examine in this chapter is the suggestion that there seems to be no reason why even a God who is regarded as being impassible may not freely change in response to human prayer because such a transaction expresses the personal relationship between God and human beings. Nevertheless, Pailin's comments do make it plain that the classical doctrine does create difficulties for a coherent understanding of intercessory prayer, which in turn makes necessary an in-depth enquiry into the nature of divine impassibility.

The Doctrine of Divine Impassibility

Before a reconsideration of beliefs can take place, however, it is necessary to ask what was (and is) meant by the term 'impassibility', how the doctrine arose, in what context, and what motives governed its formation. The Fathers of the early Church, in asserting the impassibility of God, did so under the influence of Greek thought. They took for granted the idea of divine *apatheia*, which for them constituted the perfection of God.[3] This meant that a being who is subject to suffering cannot be God. According to Jürgen Moltmann (1974, p.267),[4] the divine *apatheia* has many connotations. It can mean that God is incapable of being affected by outside influences; or that God is incapable of feeling; or unchangeable in the physical sense; or free in the ethical sense. *Pathos*, on the other hand, denotes need, compulsion, desire, the possession of drives, dependence and unwilled suffering, and it was inconceivable in Greek thought that God should be subject to such passions. As a perfect being, nothing could happen to God for God to suffer or be subject to change. God must also be without emotions.

Marcel Sarot (1990, pp.365ff) draws our attention to some terminological issues. 'Impassible' originally meant 'incapable of being acted upon by an outside force'. The concept was extended to become 'incapable of being acted upon by an outside or an inside force'. In this latter sense, impassible is synonymous with immutable. But it is confusing, Sarot thinks, for impassible to be regarded as meaning the same as immutable. An immutable being is not subject to change, full stop. An impassible being is not subject to change or influence by *external* factors. According to Sarot, theologians who take a passibilist position must hold that God can be influenced only in a personal way and never in a causal way.[5] To view the relation with God as a personal relation implies the freedom of God, so that God changes in a free reaction to human beings and is thus subject to change by *internal* factors. It is not possible to assert that God is changed only by external factors. This implies that, correctly speaking, we should refer to God's impassibility rather than to God's immutability.

In all this, Sarot finds support in Moltmann (1974, p.229), who suggests that to speak of God's unchangeability is merely a simile. What is meant is that God is not changeable as creatures are changeable. It is not that God is not free to change; only that God is not under external constraint. In a way similar to Sarot, Moltmann suggests that God might be free to allow the divine being to be changed by others of God's own free will. God's unchangeableness, therefore, is not absolute or intrinsic. For reasons such as these, Moltmann advocates a midway position, a form of suffering between unwilling suffering as the result of an alien cause on the one hand and being essentially unable to suffer on the other. This is the suffering of love in which one voluntarily opens oneself to the possibility of being affected by another (ibid., p.230). In spite of such careful qualifications, however, it might prove difficult for us in practice to distinguish clearly between causal influence upon God by external factors and God's own free decision to change in response to those external factors.

It is now necessary for us to trace the historical development of the doctrine of divine impassibility and its almost total overthrow in modern times. The controversy over the impassibility of God first arose in the context of early Church arguments about the nature of the godhead and the unity of the person of Christ. They came to a focus in discussion about the suffering of Jesus. Richard Bauckham writes: 'Tensions in the patristic view of God arose especially in the attempt to reconcile the immutability and impassibility of God with the Fathers' belief in a real incarnation and in the real sufferings of Christ' (Bauckham, 1984, p.8). Marcel Sarot sums up the point at issue by saying, 'We encounter God in Christ, because Christ is God incarnate, so that when Christ suffers, God incarnate suffers, and this seems incompatible with the divine impassibility' (Sarot, 1992a, p.114).

In their exploration of the nature of the Godhead some early Christian thinkers were constrained by their convictions concerning the unity of God and the divinity of Christ, and so they tended to blur the distinctions between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. These distinctions, or modes, were regarded by modalists, as they came to be called, as being merely adjectival and not substantive. Modalists

therefore suspected that the doctrine of the Logos put the oneness of the Godhead at risk. They considered that any inference that the Word was other than, or was a person distinct from, the Father was virtually the blasphemy of ditheism (Kelly, 1977, p.119). Thus Paul of Samosata, who was a late exponent of this way of thinking, saw Christ as an ordinary man inspired by the divine wisdom. He applied the term 'Word' not to the self-subsistent Word who was in Christ but merely, rather, to God's command and ordinance. He used Trinitarian language, but only as a cover for a theology which, according to one view of his thought, was unitarian (ibid., p.118).

One of the first to teach so-called 'patripassian' doctrines, namely that it was the Father who suffered and underwent Christ's other human experiences, was Noetus of Smyrna. He vigorously affirmed only one God, the Father, and as a result advocated the position that it was the Father who suffered and underwent Christ's other human experiences. Christ must be identical to the Father; otherwise he would not be God. Accordingly, if Christ suffered, then the Father also suffered, because there could be no division in the Godhead. Noetus also rejected the Logos doctrine and interpreted the meaning of the Logos in the Prologue to the Gospel of John in allegorical rather than substantive terms (ibid., p.120). In condemning Noetus and his followers Hippolytus reported that they believed in one undivided Godhead which could be designated either as Father or as Son. The terms did not stand for real distinctions, but were merely titles applicable according to particular need or purpose.

A major contribution to this debate at that time was made by Tertullian in his *Adversus Praxeas*. We need to exercise caution as we know of Praxeas and his teaching only from Tertullian. There is even a suggestion that Praxeas was an imaginary opponent whom Tertullian had invented, rather than a real person. Nevertheless, we can take it that real views were being reported. Praxeas also seems to have taught that Father and Son were one identical Person and that the Word had no independent subsistence. It was the Father himself, therefore, who entered the Virgin's womb (so, becoming, as it were, his own Son), who suffered, died and rose again. United in this unique person were the mutually inconsistent attributes of passibility and impassibility. In his debate with Tertullian, Praxeas is forced, finally, to recognize a duality in the Lord – Jesus (the Son) and Christ (properly, the Father) – thus leading to the statement, 'while it is the Son who suffers, the Father co-suffers' (ibid., p.121). Tertullian's response to this was 'what else is compassion but "suffering with"?' In other words, if Praxeas' use of the term 'co-suffered' is anything more than a change of words then it undermines the modalist position as it opens the door to a duality in the Godhead as well as in the Son.

The most sophisticated exponent of modalism was Sabellius, for whom God was by nature a monad with three names. While Sabellius gives these three modes a more objective character, he still regards them as successive and not simultaneous. It seems that Sabellius borrowed Trinitarian terminology in order to counter the accusation of patripassianism (ibid., p.122). Callistus, too, although he spoke of the Father as being identical with the Word, and even as becoming

incarnate, was careful to say that the Father merely 'co-suffered' with the Son (ibid., p.124).

However, it would appear that divine impassibility was not the central issue in the patripassian controversy. Sarot suggests that the debate seemed to rest on a confusion in the meaning of the term 'Father'. Against patripassians such as Praxeas, Tertullian used 'Father' to refer to the first Person of the Trinity, whereas the other side used the word as equivalent to God *simpliciter*, who was incarnated in the Son. In fact, it does not seem to have been the intention of the patripassians to deny that the divine nature was in itself impassible. Rather, their distinguishing feature was the refusal, through fear of ditheism, to endorse the distinction between the Father and the Son. As impassibilists, they saw no other way of affirming that God really suffered in Jesus without implying ditheism. Thus, according to Sarot (1990, p.370), being a patripassian did not determine whether a particular person held to the passibility of God or not. He suggests that patripassianism 'should only be used for those theological positions which fail to distinguish between God the Father and God the Son and therefore hold that in the suffering of Jesus God *simpliciter* and not God the Son was involved' (ibid., p.372).

Arius can be taken as another example of the way in which the concept of God's impassibility influenced Christological thinking. Frances Young says it is a matter of debate whether Arius was moved by soteriological considerations, whether he was merely reflecting an exegetical debate about certain key biblical texts concerning the status of the Logos, or whether in fact he was trying to work out the logical consequences of his philosophical presuppositions which, in any case, he shared with his opponents (Young, 1983, pp.61 ff). It is also a matter of debate how far Arius was continuing the legacy of Antiochene thought originating with Paul of Samosata (Kelly, 1977, p.230). Nevertheless, for Arius God was unique, transcendent and indivisible and it was impossible for God to share the divine being or essence with any other being, however exalted that being might be, otherwise the implication would be that God is divisible and subject to change, which is impossible according to this way of thinking. By means of such thinking Arius was led to his view that the Son was a creature, though perfect, not co-eternal with God but with a beginning, in principle fallible and mutable. In effect this turned the Son into a secondary divine but created being, intermediate between God and the world (ibid., p.277 ff).[6]

Similar confusions reappear in the later Nestorian controversy and the debates over the term *Theotokos* (God-bearer) as applied to the Virgin. In this later term, the prefix *theo-*, as also in the term *theopaschitism*, does not mean God *simpliciter* but God incarnate, the incarnate *Logos* (Sarot, 1990, p.372). Theopaschite language fell into disrepute when it was used by Apollonarius, but it was defended by Cyril of Alexandria and opposed by Nestorius. Many champions of theopaschitism were also Monophysites.

It now becomes necessary to say something about the doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum*, which states that, because of the unity of the person of Christ, properties that belong to his divine nature can be predicated on his human nature, and vice versa. Although this concept can be misused, it is nevertheless

possible to assert by its means that, in view of the unity of Christ's person, the divine *Logos* suffered when Christ suffered, although this does not mean that the divine *nature* suffered. Thus, in his defence of the term *Theotokos*, Cyril of Alexander could say in his twelfth Anathema: 'the Logos which originated from God suffered in the flesh, was crucified in the flesh, tasted death in the flesh'. Cyril conceived of each of the natures as participating in the properties of the other, so close and so real was the union for him. But there were limits: the Word did not actually suffer in its own nature, but only as incarnate, while remaining in itself immune from suffering (Kelly, 1977, p.322). It was thus by use of the *communicatio idiomatum* that Alexandrine Christianity could attribute the sufferings of Jesus to the incarnate Logos. In its own nature the Logos was impassible and immortal, but the Son of God himself suffered and died on the cross (Young, 1983, p.261). But the language often seems paradoxical: 'He suffered impassibly' (Cyril); 'the suffering of one who could not suffer' (Gregory Nazianzus).

However, Antiochene Christianity as represented by Nestorius was deeply suspicious of the *communicatio idiomatum*. Antiochenes believed that any exchange of predicates could be no more than a matter of words so that, for instance, in relation to the term *Theotokos* they objected that God could not be born. Instead they spoke of Christ as a man whom God was pleased to inhabit in the same way as God inhabits a temple. Nestorius could allow that the Logos could properly be said to have suffered only in the sense in which, for instance, a monarch suffers when his statue is dishonoured (Kelly, 1977, p.316). However, Frances Young points out that the Antiochenes and the Alexandrines were not really so far apart. The Antiochenes could not make the Logos directly the subject of the incarnation, passion and death of Christ, whereas Cyril was trying to do exactly that (Young, 1983, p.228). The comments of Sarot are again worth noting here. He believes that there is no contradiction in the assertion that the impassible Logos, without losing its impassible nature, suffered by reason of its union with the flesh (Sarot, 1992b, p.115). But he also reminds us that the theopaschite debate was, like its earlier precursor the patripassian controversy, essentially Christological in its essence. He therefore suggests that the term *theopaschite* should be reserved to denote the theological position according to which the incarnate Logos suffered. This helps to avoid some of the confusion that has crept into modern thinking when the term is used in a loose way (Sarot, 1990, p.375).[7]

All this explains why the Fathers of the early Church, though they were impassibilists, could be in practice such fervent believers in the power of prayer. Their focus was so concentrated on the nature of the Godhead and the person of Christ that it is possible they never made the connection between those debates and their implications for an understanding, and for the practice, of prayer. J.F.K.Mozley suggests that the motives prompting the assertion of divine impassibility were bound up with beliefs in the divine transcendence and in the blessedness of the divine life which is independent of the world, together with a dread of anthropomorphism. He continues:

> beyond a certain point orthodox theology could not go. It could not make an adequate investigation of Patripassianism, or Monophysitism, to see whether any precious elements of truth might be involved in either heresy. That was not the method of those ages, and, indeed, in no age, while a struggle is actually taking place, is it easy to appreciate what may be the strong points in an opponent's position. (Mozley, 1926, p.175)

It is therefore no wonder that the Fathers did not see the contradiction between their insistence upon the impassibility of God and their belief in the efficacy of prayer. They were so certain of the truth of the views they held that it would have been impossible for them to admit that anything in their religious practice might cast doubt upon beliefs they held so fervently.

Mozley goes on to suggest that the modern reaction against impassibilism starts from certain convictions about God's nature as Love and about God's relations with the world. In the modern view, he writes, the world comes into being and develops its life through creative processes which reflect the tension and costliness that are present throughout the whole evolutionary process. Mozley suggests that this implies that the suffering of the world involves the suffering of God (ibid., pp.175f). But before dealing at greater length with the modern abandonment of the doctrine of divine impassibility it is important that we note the elements of truth within it.

The Strength of the Case for Impassibility

We have already noted J.F.K. Mozley's assessment of the motives governing the assertion of divine impassibility. F. House also believed it to be a valuable safeguard against anthropomorphic views of God, despite the fact that Greek ideals of self-sufficiency had led to 'less than Christian' concepts of the divine majesty (House, 1980, p.410). Similarly, Richard Bauckham identifies several elements of truth in the doctrine of the impassibility of God. It reflects a belief in the moral constancy of God, so that God's will cannot be deflected. It reminds us that God's love is not a 'need' love, but is rather free, generous and self-giving. Finally, it tells us that God cannot be subject to suffering contrary to the divine will (Bauckham, 1984, p.8). Much the same sort of arguments were put forward by William Temple, who wrote that God is never passive in the sense that things happen to God without divine consent. God is free from 'gusts of feeling' carrying this way and that. However, Temple also believed that the application of 'impassible' to God in the sense of 'incapable of feeling' is 'almost wholly false' (Temple, 1924, pp.269f). Again, David Jenkins believes that the doctrine of God's impassibility stands for the truth that God 'does not depend on us or history or the universe for being God'. Jenkins nevertheless speaks of Christ's 'constant suffering and struggle with men' and holds that 'God can be God without man ... none the less God *will not* be God without men.' God suffers, yet while suffering does not become dependent upon the creation (Jenkins, 1976, pp.157f). Maurice Wiles also advises caution against abandoning the doctrine of divine impassibility

too easily. We cannot speak responsibly of a God who feels our sorrows, who is grieved by our sins and responds to our prayers and our love simply by affirming the passibility of God. According to Wiles, the truth of the impassibilist position is that God is never affected, as we are, by forces or events that come entirely from outside the sphere of the divine influence. God's involvement in the consequences of our evil can only ever be entirely voluntary (Wiles, 1986, pp.24–5, 49–50).

The major modern case in favour of divine impassibility is the one put forward by R.E. Creel (1986). His arguments have been debated by Charles Taliaferro (1989) and, less fully, by Paul Fiddes (1988, pp.18f, 58f, 87f). Unlike traditional impassibilists Creel does not insist that God is without all emotion, but he does make a distinction between *intensive* and *extensive* joy (or bliss) in God. This means that creatures cannot alter the depth of divine bliss, although the way the world is can alter its 'texture' or 'flavour'. The reason for such a claim lies in Creel's insistence upon creaturely freedom. Creel believes that, while God wills that creatures should have choice, God nevertheless remains indifferent to the way they choose. Fiddes, however, finds himself unable to accept this (ibid., p.87f).

Taliaferro lists six arguments used by Creel in favour of impassibilism. Firstly, Creel suggests that the horror of evil is not contingent upon whether God is grieved by it or not. Taliaferro agrees, but adds that it is not implausible to think that our horror can lead to an appreciation of the divine horror. The second of Creel's arguments is that God can act out of love and justice without being motivated by sorrow, to which Taliaferro replies that God's just action in the world may arise out of divine disapproval as well as approval, in which case God's sorrow may be a constituent of God's love. Thirdly, Creel thinks that if God is believed to be in sorrow this makes worship something close to pitying God. Taliaferro denies that this need be so, because pity implies superiority and we are not superior to a supreme Deity. Next, Creel suggests that passibilism makes God vulnerable to creaturely harm or revenge, but Taliaferro replies that rebellion against God may indeed provide an occasion for a particular manifestation of God's loving nature, but that this can hardly be thought of as *harming* God. Again, Creel cites the human concern for, and obligation to, hope, one element of which may be the hope that God is not suffering or in pain. In Creel's judgment, this provides a moral reason for preferring impassibilism to passibilism because it gives a greater attractiveness to the former. Taliaferro replies that it is not selfish or immature to hope that God will feel some degree of sadness over creaturely ills. Lastly, Creel brings forward the problem of percentages. To speak of the relationship between, or the balance of, joy and sorrow in the divine life is, he thinks, a conceptual absurdity because it supposes the divine psychology to be in a constant and unstable flux. Taliaferro, however, points out that Creel acknowledges that God's bliss can be affected extensively by the states of the world, so that he must allow for some fluctuation in the divine life. Moreover, the problem of percentages cannot be settled with subtle divine statistics. Even our own emotional life does not admit of clear quantification. The percentage problem does not entail that God has no joy or sorrow whatsoever and so does not reveal the superiority of impassibilism. Nevertheless, in spite of his view that passibilism

is a coherent view, the impassibilist tradition as represented by Creel, in the judgment of Taliaferro, has the strength of insisting that God is not subject to defect in wisdom, power and knowledge. It is therefore important that we keep in mind this positive value of the doctrine of divine impassibility as we come now to a discussion of the modern abandonment of that doctrine.

The Modern Abandonment of the Doctrine of Divine Impassibility

In many modern writers the concept of divine impassibility has virtually been eliminated as being incompatible with God's self-revelation in Christ. Bauckham (1984, p.6) writes: 'The idea that God cannot suffer, accepted as virtually axiomatic in Christian theology from the early Greek Fathers until the nineteenth century has, in this [that is, the twentieth] century, been progressively abandoned.' Why this should be so, in addition to any theological reasons for such an abandonment, has much to do with the historical context. The last century has seen war, genocide and human suffering on a scale not previously known or experienced. If God is love, then it seems inconceivable that the pain of suffering humanity is not felt at the centre of the divine life, for a love that is personal in its nature involves the suffering of the one who loves. An early exponent of this point of view was G.A. Studdert-Kennedy, an army chaplain (known as 'Woodbine Willie') in the First World War who experienced at first hand the horrors of trench warfare. This experience reinforced his prior conviction, formed by working as a priest among the poor, that Jesus revealed a suffering God, although for him this was as much a political point as a doctrinal one.[8] He wrote: 'One needs a Father, and a Father must suffer in His children's suffering. I could not worship a passionless potentate ... In their hearts all true men worship one God – the naked, wounded, bloody but unconquered and unconquerable Christ' (Studdert-Kennedy, 1918, p.95). Again, there are the famous words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his *Letters and Papers from Prison* which suggest that 'only a suffering God can help'. As with Studdert-Kennedy, the historical context would also have been influential in Bonhoeffer's case. The struggle against Nazism and Bonhoeffer's own personal circumstances of imprisonment and impending execution would have influenced his thinking. But even so, when we read such words as the following, it is plain that we are breathing here a totally different kind of air to that which the Fathers of the early Church breathed.

> God allows himself to be edged out of the world and on to the cross. God is weak and powerless in the world, and that is exactly the way, the only way, in which he can be with us and help us. Matthew 8:17 makes it crystal clear that it is not by his omnipotence that Christ helps us, but by his weakness and suffering.
>
> This is the decisive difference between Christianity and the religions. Man's religiosity makes him look in his distress to the power of God in the world; he uses God as a *Deus ex machina*. The Bible however directs him to the powerlessness and suffering of God; only a suffering God can help. (Bonhoeffer, 1959, p.122)

But the historical context alone cannot be enough to account sufficiently for a doctrine of divine suffering. Theological and philosophical considerations have also played their part. One such consideration already mentioned starts from an analysis of divine love. W.H. Vanstone (1977, pp.39ff) analyses the phenomenology of love and reaches the conclusion that the love of God is infinitely more vulnerable to suffering than it is commonly represented to be. Love is self-giving, through which it grants power over itself to the beloved. Divine love is limitless, precarious and vulnerable; its denial must thus be limitation, control and detachment (ibid., p.53). Vanstone finds this same pattern in the activity of God in creation, which is also therefore limitless, precarious and vulnerable. The work of creation is not the serene and effortless activity of popular devotion. It is precarious in that it proceeds by no assured programme, and its security lies in the fact that God will not abandon it. It is vulnerable in the sense that the issue of God's love as triumph or tragedy depends upon the response of the creation, although that response will not diminish or destroy God's love even though it will mark it as being either triumphant or tragic (ibid., pp.59–70). Such ideas allow Vanstone to offer, amongst other things, an interpretation of intercessory prayer, to which we shall come in due course. But, again, in such thinking we have come a very long way from the impassible God of the Fathers. An impassible God could never be said to be vulnerable, or the activity of such a Being precarious.

Another theological approach to a doctrine of divine suffering sees the cross as the central revelation of God's nature, so that the sufferings and death of Christ *reveal* the divine passibility. For instance, Hastings Rashdall wrote: 'If we cannot say that the actual sufferings of Christ ... are literally the sufferings of God, we may ... say that the suffering Christ reveals a suffering God' (Rashdall, 1919, pp.453–4). Similarly, John Stott sees the cross of Christ as the proof of God's loving personal solidarity with human beings in their pain. He affirms that God's eternal, holy love, which was uniquely exhibited in the sacrifice of the cross, continues to suffer with us in every situation in which it is called forth. Furthermore, self-giving love is inevitably vulnerable to pain because it exposes itself to the possibility of rejection. Stott admits in a discussion of the classical doctrine of divine impassibility that God cannot be influenced against the divine will from either inside or outside. Nevertheless, because God's full and final self-revelation was given in Jesus, his feelings and sufferings are an authentic reflection of the feelings and sufferings of God (Stott, 1986, pp.329ff). Other writers are also careful to state that although, in their view, God suffers this does not imply any imperfection in God. Taliaferro also believes passibilism to be a coherent viewpoint. He writes: 'To suppose that God suffers is not to suppose that God has any defect ... the sorrow of God is to be thought of as a manifestation of His love for creation.' He concludes his article with these words:

> there are deep reasons for thinking that God suffers. The impassibilist position has considerable strengths and I believe that its insistence that God is not subject to defect or corruption in wisdom, power and knowledge to be religiously and philosophically appealing. God cannot be diverted from acting justly or in holy love ... his love includes

sorrow as well as joy over the world. Moreover, this sorrowing is by no means a defect ... sorrowing love is part of the beauty of holiness. (Taliaferro, 1989, p.224)

Bauckham makes the same point when he writes: '[God's] suffering does not deflect him from his purpose but accomplishes his purpose' (Bauckham, 1984, p.12). These, then, are just a few examples of the very common view today that, in the words of A.N. Whitehead, God 'is the great fellow-sufferer who understands' (Whitehead, 1978, p.351). We must now turn to three major contributions to this debate before we apply such thought to an understanding of intercessory prayer.

Jürgen Moltmann: The Crucified God

This very important modern discussion about the sufferings of God has already been referred to, where we saw that Moltmann takes the view that there is a midway position between suffering that is the unwilled result of an alien cause and being essentially unable to suffer, with the result that God is free without constraint to undergo self-change.[9] Like Vanstone, Moltmann also expounds the phenomenology of love, asserting that love contains within itself the possibility of suffering, since in love one voluntarily opens oneself to the possibility of being affected by another. For this reason, the assertion that God is incapable of suffering contradicts the assertion that God is love (Moltmann, 1974, p.230). It will also be necessary to take into account Moltmann's more recent work, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. It is in this latter work that Moltmann expounds the love of God in Trinitarian terms, asserting that the creation is part of the eternal love affair between Father and Son. However, since creation means for God self-limitation, creative love can be none other than suffering love. In this way Moltmann traces the suffering of God back to the act of creation *ex nihilo* (Moltmann, 1981, pp.57–60).

Like many other modern exponents of the *pathos* of God, Moltmann (1974, p.270; 1981, pp.25–7) refers to the work of Abraham Heschel (1962) who identifies the 'anthropopathisms' of the Old Testament, particularly those found in the prophetic writings, in which God is represented as being affected by events and by human actions, and as suffering in history, because God is interested in the creation. In effect, Heschel (a Jewish scholar) is expressing here a form of modalism since for him the divine *pathos* is not identified with God's being but is rather expressed in God's relationship with Israel. In Heschel's thought God's *pathos* does not belong to the divine essence.

Moltmann also sees an inner logical connection between the two distinctive features of Christianity, the theology of the cross and the theology of the Trinity, which belong together (Moltmann, 1974, pp.241ff). He believes that it is not enough to say, as some have said, that the cross merely *reveals* the suffering of God. Rather, the cross is the decisive event of divine suffering, not just an illustration of it, and so is an event internal to God's own Trinitarian being. Moltmann, therefore, does not interpret the death of Jesus as a divine–human event: 'What is in question in the relationship of Christ to his Father is not his

divinity and humanity and their relationship to each other, but the total, personal aspect of the Sonship of Jesus. This starting point is not the same as that to be found in the tradition' (ibid., p.245). The Father as well as the Son, therefore, must be understood as suffering in the event of the cross, but they suffer in different ways:

> We cannot therefore say here in patripassian terms that the Father also suffered and died. The suffering and dying of the Son, forsaken by the Father, is a different kind of suffering from the suffering of the Father in the death of the Son. Nor can the death of Jesus be understood in theopaschite terms as the 'death of God'. To understand what happened between Jesus and his God and Father on the cross, it is necessary to talk in trinitarian terms. The Son suffers dying; the Father suffers the death of the Son. (Ibid., p.243)

Perhaps Sarot would take exception to Moltmann's use of the terms 'patripassian' and 'theopaschite', but that is not the important point. Rather, it is that for Moltmann the cross of Jesus is a *divine* event. It is an event between Jesus and his God and Father: 'The doctrine of the Trinity . . . is nothing other than a shorter version of the passion narrative . . . The content of the doctrine of the Trinity is the real cross of Christ himself. The form of the crucified Christ is the Trinity' (ibid., p.246).

However, this view has been subjected to sympathetic criticism by Paul Fiddes, to whose thought we shall come shortly. Fiddes (1988, pp.5–12) offers a critique of Moltmann's view that the particular death of Jesus was more than a disclosure of the continual love of God but was also the critical point of contact of God with human suffering in general. Fiddes questions whether such a conviction can actually be illuminated by talk, as Moltmann talks, of a 'beginning' of a divine history of suffering, or of a 'containing of all human suffering' in the cross of Jesus (Fiddes, 1988, p.6). *The Crucified God*, by stressing the particular event of forsakenness in the cross seems, in Fiddes' judgment, to play down a universal suffering in God (ibid., p.11).

Fiddes also believes that there is a flaw in Moltmann's attempt to avoid patripassianism. The word 'God' is not to be reserved for the Father alone, but is also to be applied to the Son, so that it can be said that God is in the dying of the Son also. In other words, Moltmann's view that the Son suffers dying while the Father suffers the death of the Son introduces too much conflict and division into the being of God. Furthermore, the doctrine of *perichoresis* (the mutual indwelling of the three Persons of the Trinity) suggests that it is not meaningful to distinguish so sharply between the experience of death by the Father and of dying by the Son (ibid., pp.195–8). In discussing Moltmann's later work, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, which touches on these same themes, Fiddes finds that when Moltmann asserts that God's outward acts correspond to God's inward suffering and that God's outward suffering corresponds to God's inward acts (Moltmann, 1981, p.98), he is in reality proposing that God becomes the source of God's own suffering, less the supreme victim than the supreme self-executioner (Fiddes, 1988, p.137). When Moltmann says: 'The suffering of love is

God's supreme work on God himself' (Moltmann, 1981, p.99) Fiddes comments that this does not take seriously enough the impact of the world upon God. There is not enough in Moltmann's thought of the divine suffering as the result of an external influence from the world. Because Moltmann understands the cross in terms of suffering within the immanent Trinity the human response of Jesus is missing.

Despite such criticisms, Moltmann's contribution to the abandonment of the strict doctrine of divine impassibility is of major importance and will prove fruitful when it comes to its application to an understanding of petitionary and intercessory prayer. Moltmann himself, as we shall see in a moment, offers one or two specific hints in this respect.

Paul Fiddes: The Creative Suffering of God

Fiddes' book is another major survey of recent thought about the suffering of God. The task that the author sets himself is, in his own words, 'to speak consistently of *a God who suffers eminently and yet is still God, and a God who suffers universally and yet is still present uniquely and decisively in the sufferings of Christ*' (Fiddes, 1988, p.3 – his emphasis). In dialogue not only with Moltmann, but also with Barth and the exponents of process theology, Fiddes (ibid., pp.16–45) identifies four reasons for the radical and remarkable overturning in our age of the centuries of traditional belief about the impassibility of God. The first of these reasons has to do with the meaning of divine love. In the light of a modern psychological understanding of what it means to be personal, a truly personal love involves the suffering of the one who loves. This is a point that we have seen others to have made. Fiddes' comment is this: 'if God is not less than personal, and if the claim that "God is love" is to have any recognizable continuity with our normal experience of love, the conclusion seems inescapable that a loving God must be a sympathetic and therefore a suffering God' (ibid., p.17).

Fiddes' reply to the classical impassibilists is that it is impossible to exclude feelings of compassion from a good God without turning God into a despicable 'do-gooder'. Furthermore, dwelling on God's love as a 'doing good' without a 'feeling pain' runs into the problem of restricting God's love for the world, because it is apparent from an observation of the world that God's equal love for all does not result in all equally being done good to. We cannot, therefore, restrict God's love to creative beneficence while excluding shared feelings (ibid., p.18).

The second reason Fiddes gives for believing in a suffering God is the central place of the cross about which he writes: 'If . . . "God was in Christ" then it seems an inescapable conclusion that God suffered "in Christ" at the cross. If God was involved in the person and career of Jesus, then he was implicated in the experience of the crucified Christ' (ibid., p.26). Following a discussion of the patristic debates concerning the nature of the Godhead and the person of Christ, Fiddes concludes that today, in the light of the modern understanding of psychology which holds that persons become what they are through their experiences and their relationships, we must affirm that, if Christ is one with God

and one with humanity, then he must be so as a whole person. From this comes the assertion that the cross is an actualization in our history of what is eternally true of God's nature, so that the suffering of God is woven into 'the whole painful story of human evolution' (ibid., pp.28f). Fiddes concludes this section with a summary of the 'triple riposte' of current theology to the notion that only the humanity of Christ suffers in the cross: 'God suffers in the cross in *oneness* with the person of Christ; God suffers *eternally* in the cross; God is most *Godlike* in the suffering of the cross' (ibid., p.31).

Fiddes' third reason for discarding a belief in the impassibility of God is the problem of human suffering (ibid., pp.31–7). The question of theodicy, he believes, is deeply bound up with the notion of the passibility of God. There is, first of all, psychological value in a belief in a suffering God. It is a consolation to those who suffer to know that God also suffers and understands their situation from within, although such a God must also be known to be victorious in suffering and to suffer universally. Furthermore, a conviction that God suffers forbids any proposal that God causes suffering, although it might be allowed that God permits suffering. However, it is too glib to propose too sharp a distinction between what God brings about and what God permits, for such a distinction implies limitation in God even if it be self-limitation for the sake of the freedom of the creation. A God of love must not only be self-limited through taking the risk that human persons may suffer through their freedom, but also be self-limited by sharing that suffering.

The final reason given by Fiddes (ibid., pp.37–45) for believing in a suffering God is connected with the world-view with which we work today. No longer do we work with a hierarchical model of the world, as did the Fathers and the medieval Schoolmen, nor with a model of the world as a machine as in the rational theology of the eighteenth century. Today, after the rise of the biological sciences and the evolutionary hypothesis, we think of the world as a living organism in which concepts of design and cause have been replaced by concepts of purpose and persuasion, with God working from within the creation. But such concepts involve vulnerability and suffering. Fiddes concludes that 'a suffering God is a God who is changed by the world, who is even under constraint from it' (ibid., p.45).

Having thus abandoned the concept of divine impassibility, Fiddes proceeds to explore what it means to say God suffers. He suggests that the God who has freely chosen to be fulfilled through the creation, even though this opens the divine being to suffering, can only be changed in order to become more truly God. Central to such talk about God being 'fulfilled' or changing to become 'more truly God' is the idea of the desire of God (ibid., pp.71ff). It is not that God desires suffering per se, for that would be a kind of divine masochism. Rather, God desires fellowship with creatures and out of that desire freely chooses to suffer. Because it is a matter of free choice, God is not ruled by suffering. Instead, God is fulfilled through suffering, as God becomes more truly God through suffering with the world. But it is actually the satisfaction of God's desire that fulfils God rather than the suffering itself (ibid., pp.108f). It is clear that in such thinking about God becoming more truly God we have come a long way from the kind of thought,

mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, concerning the perfection of God that excludes all and any change in God.

The concept of God as Trinity is also important in Fiddes' thought, for only a God who exists in relationship can be a God who is open to relationships with the world. Our fellowship with God, which God desires, can add something to the being of God only if God has a history of coming to fellowship with Godself (ibid., p.83). However, this desire of God for fellowship with us is a desire that needs to be satisfied by us. We are able to enrich the being of God only through our freely contributing to the project of creation. Fiddes' preference is for Barth's concept of the persons in God as modes of being characterized by mutual relationships rather than for Moltmann's concept of the three persons as being analogous to human persons with the necessary element of interpersonalness (*perichoresis*) (ibid., pp.139f). This latter concept leaves us with a divine society which, while not impassible and self-sufficient, remains nevertheless the source of its own suffering. On the other hand, conceiving God as a complex of relationships inevitably involves our response. Such talk makes sense only in terms of our participation in God (ibid., p.141).[10] Fiddes sums up his conclusions as to how God can be 'the God who suffers and remains God' by saying:

> The transcendence of a suffering God can only be understood as a transcendent suffering, not a transcendence beyond suffering. Only the thought of God as Trinity can make sense of transcendent suffering, for only a God who happens as an event of relationships can be both other than and yet inclusive of the world. He can include all suffering in himself as he includes all human relationships, yet he is other than the world in his unique suffering, taking our suffering into himself out of the depths of the more profound and terrible suffering which remains his own. (Ibid., p.143)

To sum up, as with Moltmann there is much in what Fiddes says that has an application to an understanding of intercessory prayer. Certainly, if it is true that God can be changed by the world, then there must certainly be room for prayer within such an understanding of the universe. But before we can begin to make such an application there is one other major modern contribution to the debate to be considered.

Marcel Sarot: God, Passibility and Corporeality

Reference has already been made to articles by Marcel Sarot. Since the publication of those articles he has produced a major work on the subject of divine passibility (Sarot, 1992b) in which much of the argument, as in his earlier articles, proceeds by a careful definition of terms. In his discussion of divine immutability Sarot is in essential agreement with Moltmann when he asserts that God cannot change or be changed as the result of an external cause. However, this does not mean that God is not free to change God's own being, or even free to allow the divine being to be changed by others. God need not be immutable *simpliciter.* Provided that there is 'something in control' in God which must remain immutable, it might be possible

to maintain that God is mutable in some respects and immutable in others. By dividing the divine attributes into first- and second-order categories,[11] it can be claimed that in God immutability belongs to the second order and is a property to be ascribed to certain first-order attributes concerning God's moral character or abilities, which the divine perfection requires to be immutable (ibid., pp.49ff).

Sarot also applies this kind of thinking to a consideration of God's omnipotence and omniscience. In particular, he asks if God is able to *limit* the divine omnipotence and suggests that at best this is an inaccurate way of speaking because it implies that God limits the possibilities that are open to God for future action. Sarot says that God could do this only if there are states of affairs resistant to the divine omnipotence, which is impossible because it is a constraint upon the divine freedom.[12] However, God may *restrain* the divine omnipotence. Sarot believes that it is better to speak of divine self-restraint (in which God remains in control) than of divine self-limitation (in which God gives up control). Because God remains in control, a self-restrained God is more reliable than a self-limited God. The former is able to end such self-restraint at any time, implying that God can interfere whenever God so wills.

So far as immutability with respect to God's feelings is concerned (which is how he defines the meaning of 'impassibility') Sarot says that feelings are not part of God's moral character, although they are part of God's abilities since they provide God with a certain kind of knowledge that cannot be obtained in any other way. He thinks that it is better to say that what is immutable is God's *ability to feel*, although this does not mean that the individual feelings are also immutable. It can therefore be affirmed that God is not immutable with respect to divine feelings. To the objection of Aquinas that for God to change means that God acquires what God did not have before and that this is impossible because God cannot acquire anything more, Sarot replies that God can change without growing more or less perfect. This leads Sarot to a discussion of God's eternality (ibid., p.57).

Although eternality implies immutability, since change occurs in time, Sarot says that we are not compelled to conclude that God exists eternally, since we are not compelled to accept that God is absolutely immutable. Changing things can be known as changing only by a knower whose awareness follows along with the changes. Therefore, if God sees things as changing, then the divine awareness must be mutable and so not eternal. This leads Sarot to conclude that God's mode of existence is 'everlasting' rather than 'eternal'. Thus God's omniscience requires God to exist in time, otherwise God could not be passible.[13]

Sarot helpfully summarizes the arguments against (ibid., pp.65f) and for (ibid., p.102) passibilism. He begins by listing three arguments against, the first of which is that a perfect being could not have imperfect experiences, which a passible being must be capable of having. This objection fails, he says, because the imperfection attaching to many of the experiences of passibility is not intrinsic. Next, God's unconditionedness is incompatible with passibility, to which the reply is that God is self-existent, not self-sufficient. God may be influenced by the world so long as this influence is subject to God's will. God need not be immutable *simpliciter*. Sarot believes that the divine perfection requires God to be immutable

with respect to the divine moral character and abilities but in other respects a perfect God may change, provided that such change is always under the control of the divine will.[14] The third objection to passibilism suggests that God's blissfulness is incompatible with passibility. Sarot replies that we expect moral agents to respond emotionally to suffering and moral evil.[15] Although a happy God will be better able to help us than an unhappy God, this does not mean that God's happiness cannot be mixed with sorrow and that God cannot be passible. If God suffers, the divine suffering must be imbedded in God's happiness and not the other way round. So far as arguments in favour of passibilism are concerned, Sarot accepts three variants of points we have already noted. Firstly, a passible God is better able to console one who suffers. Secondly, a perfectly loving God must be passible. Thirdly, if Christ is the supreme revelation of the Father, the Father must be passible.

Sarot also argues for the possibility of the corporeality of God, which implies a concept of the world as God's body (ibid., pp.209ff).[16] Such ideas help to clarify how God may be passible, have feelings in relation to the universe, and possess an emotional life independent of the cosmos. Sarot's concept of God's corporeality is a holistic one, based on the concept of personhood, rather than one based upon mind–body dualism. Part of his argument is that, although traditionally God has been regarded as incorporeal, God is also regarded as personal, and the persons we know are all embodied. Furthermore, persons are able to perceive things, and one kind of perception is immediate, direct awareness. Sarot suggests that, if God's knowledge of the world is like our knowledge of the insides of our bodies, a doctrine of divine omniscience will suggest that we see the world as God's body, and if we see that world as God's body then we may say that God feels every part of the world and everything that we feel. Moreover, as persons, human beings feel not only with their bodies, but also in reaction to them, which suggests that God is capable of feeling not only with the world but also in reaction to it. God is thus capable of distinguishing feelings of the world and feelings in reaction to the world.

Prayer and the Suffering of God

To sum up this lengthy description and discussion of various contributions to the debate concerning divine impassibility it can be said that, although there are truths about God to which the concept of God's impassibility points and which must not be abandoned, there are nevertheless very good reasons for modifying it. Even so, it is a complex issue, and there are subtleties to be taken notice of that should warn us against a simple affirmation that 'God suffers'. What can be affirmed is that God is not incapable of changing God's own being in reaction to the world. God can also be said to have feelings and to suffer. Applying such a conclusion to an understanding of the nature of petitionary and intercessory prayer will lead us to the conclusion that the objection that the doctrine of divine impassibility makes such prayer impossible can be overcome.

Concerning the problems for an understanding of prayer raised by the classical doctrine of divine impassibility, it seems at first sight that an impassible God ought not to be able to respond to human petitions. However, proponents of the doctrine of divine impassibility do not always seem, in the practice of their faith, to have acted entirely consistently with their views. In spite of holding to the concept of divine impassibility they were nevertheless believers in the possibility of prayer and fervent in their practice of it. However, we have also seen that there are good reasons to modify, but not entirely abandon, the classical doctrine of divine impassibility and to affirm the passibility of God. At the same time, arguments for the modification of this doctrine have also appeared to have relevance for the understanding of intercessory prayer. Of especial relevance here are those arguments which suggest that God is free to allow the divine being to change or even to be changed by the world,[17] or which speak of a God who suffers, stressing God's desire for fellowship with creatures and emphasizing the response of the creation to its Creator. The doctrine of the Trinity also speaks of a God who exists in relationship being open to the relationships of the world. And those who make the point that the idea of an impassible God is incompatible with the idea of a God of love, and who also speak about the openness of love, have a contribution to make as well. We shall consider these different approaches as we seek to answer the question posed in the title of this chapter as to whether God is capable of answering prayer.

Praying to a God who is Capable of Changing

Once the doctrine of divine impassibility is abandoned, there would appear to be no problem in conceiving that a passible God, who feels with humans in their suffering and need and feels in the divine self a reaction to this suffering and need, is capable of responding to human prayer. Whether such a God might actually intervene, and how, is another matter but, per se, a passible God is a God able to answer prayer. We have also seen that some argue for a midway position between the full doctrine of divine impassibility and the belief that God is passible. Their need for such a midway position lies in their perception of truths about God to which the doctrine of divine impassibility points, and which suggest that God is not to be deflected from the divine purpose or diverted from acting in justice and holy love. The key point in such arguments lies in the understanding of the divine will they embody. If God always remains in control of the divine being the possibility remains open for God to change or be changed in a free response to prayer, or to allow God's own being to be changed by them. This may not be the same as saying that the prayers have *caused* the change in God, although process theology may come close to asserting this. On the other hand, many would claim that the doctrine of divine impassibility is a safeguard against any implication that God is acted upon causally by the world.

Another midway position lies in the suggestion that God may be passible or mutable in some respects and impassible or immutable in other respects. Marcel Sarot has helpfully suggested that immutability is a second-order attribute of

God, so that immutability may be predicated on certain of God's first-order attributes which have to do with divine moral character or abilities. This opens the way to argue that God may not be absolutely immutable. It is suggested that God may be immutable with respect to *the ability to feel*, without the feelings themselves being immutable. Such thinking insists that what remains unchangeable in God is that which is 'in control' of the divine life, so that the influence of the world upon God, particularly through the agency of prayer, is always subject to the divine will.

One writer previously mentioned, but whose views we have not so far considered in this chapter, is Vincent Brümmer, who also addresses the issue of the meaningfulness of impetratory prayer (prayer asking God to act) when God is held to be immutable (Brümmer, 1984, pp.34–40). An immutable God should not be able to react to what we do or feel or, indeed, to the petitions we offer. Such a God would also be incapable of personal relationship. However, like other writers, Brümmer also doubts whether we need to ascribe an absolute form of immutability to God. God may be immutable in a less absolute sense that is consistent with God being a person able to relate to personal agents in a universe within which contingent events occur and personal agents live. In particular, Brümmer calls attention to the distinction between the relational and non-relational predicates of God. He proposes that God may not be immutable with respect to the former while remaining unable to change with respect to the latter. If this is so, then real changes take place in what God is related to, rather than in God's own self, and this entails the view that prayer brings about change only in the circumstances of the one who prays and not in God. This is consistent with the view that prayer is merely therapeutic meditation. Even so, Brümmer feels that there are two questionable presuppositions attached to this kind of reasoning. It is not the case that such a sharp distinction exists between the two kinds of divine predicates. Nor is it the case that, where change takes place in a relational predicate, only one of the terms in the relation changes and that the other only apparently changes. In the light of these points Brümmer suggests that all forms of prayer, including impetratory prayer, affect the *relation* between God and the person who prays, and have a real effect on both. In turn, this presupposes that God is a personal agent capable of real response both to contingent events and to the free acts, including the offering of prayer, that human beings perform.

The consequence of all this, according to Brümmer, is that we do not have to choose between abandoning impetratory prayer as meaningless on one hand and rejecting the doctrine of divine immutability on the other. It is not incoherent to maintain that God as personal is capable of change in some respects and, at the same time, hold that God is immutable in certain other respects. God is faithful to the divine character and so is immutable in this personal sense, but this does not mean that petitionary and intercessory prayer is meaningless. On the contrary, 'belief in the faithfulness of God is the most important ground for trusting him and laying our desires before him in prayer'.

From a consideration of such arguments, we may conclude that even a God who is in some or even all respects immutable is nevertheless capable of intervening in

the world in response to human intercession should this be in accordance with the divine will. The concept of the impassibility of God does not necessarily make intercessory prayer impossible.

Prayer as a Sharing in the Pain of God

Eric Hayman (1957) suggests that intercession involves a sharing in the pain and grief caused to God by the evil and suffering endured by the creation: ‘In praying for others, prayer which is rooted in the will of God and bearing pain for his love’s sake … the intercessor receives in his own person the anguish of the world’s sorrows, its helplessness, its confusion, its sin.’

W.H. Vanstone also interprets intercessory prayer in relation to the suffering of God and sees it as the offering of the will to participate, uphold and support:

> We are moved to intercession by tragedy, or the possibility of tragedy … We presuppose that this is the situation in which the activity of love will be strained to the greatest intensity, in which love can discover yet further resources only because it must … We are moved to intercession to the degree that, at the point of tragedy or potential tragedy, we understand the intensity of the divine giving … We are assisted in prayer … by understanding of that divine activity which is expended upon that person or situation, of the extremity and costliness of its endeavour. The intercession of the Church expresses our understanding of how costly a thing we are asking when we say ‘Thy will be done’. (Vanstone, 1977, pp.110–11)

However, in neither of these quotations is there any suggestion of a divine movement in response to the prayer, so these writers may still be open to the charge that they are holding to a view of prayer that is little more than an alignment of the will of the one who prays to the will of God. Indeed, Vanstone’s interpretation of prayer sees it as hardly more than an exercise in sympathetic imagination which might almost stand on its own without reference to God. This is seen in his illustration of watching the most precarious stage of a rescue or mountain climb, or the supreme effort of an artist or athlete. He writes: ‘We have no power to give practical help. He who struggles must struggle in his own strength’ (ibid., p.110). But Vanstone does not explain how our intercession helps the one who struggles. In the quotation above, he did speak of the ‘divine activity which is expended upon that person or that situation’, but it is *our* understanding of that activity of which he speaks and which motivates us to intercession. It is not a newly-granted understanding granted to the one prayed for which might give further help or strength to that person. Furthermore, it is an *understanding* of the divine activity which in Vanstone’s thought is linked to the prayer, and there seems to be no hint of any divine activity directed towards the person or situation prayed for in response to the prayer. This hardly seems to be an adequate account of the nature of intercession. So, while it remains the case that sharing in the pain of God is an important, if not essential, aspect of such prayer, nevertheless this cannot be the only or even the main way in which it may be understood.

Praying in the Event of the Trinity

We saw earlier how Jürgen Moltmann suggested that all human history is taken up into the 'history of God', that is, the death of Jesus on the cross. He writes: 'It is ... the event of Golgotha ... from which the Spirit who opens up the future and creates life in fact derives' (Moltmann, 1974, p.247). He continues to suggest that, if we conceive of the Trinity as an event of love in the suffering and death of Jesus, 'the Trinity is no self-contained group in heaven, but an eschatological process open for men on earth, which stems from the cross of Christ' (ibid., p.249).

Moltmann himself applies these ideas to the subject of prayer. Of course, if we define God as 'the event of Golgotha' then immediately we confront the difficulty that we cannot pray to an event. However, according to Moltmann, when we pray, we pray *in* an event. To quote him in full: 'One does not pray to an event, but *in* this event. One prays through the Son to the Father in the Spirit. In the brotherhood of Jesus, the person who prays has access to the Fatherhood of the Father and to the Spirit of hope' (ibid., p.247).

Paul Fiddes (1988, p.141) spells out what this might mean for us in terms of religious experience. The fact that the event of the cross reveals God means that we can only conceive of God as a complex of relationships. When we pray we are fitting into a movement like that of speech between a son and a father. In other words, to conceive God as a network of relationships implies our response, for we are participants, not spectators. Fiddes thinks that, when Moltmann speaks of sharing in the suffering of God, he does not make the relationships themselves the key to the experience. God's desire for fellowship with us is a desire that can only be satisfied by us, and one way of making our response and satisfying that desire is through prayer. This concept of prayer as a network of divine–human relationships will prove important when we come later to discuss the question of how prayer 'works'. For now we need simply note (without asking 'how') that intercessory prayer is one way in which we may contribute to the project of creation.

Conclusion: Prayer and an Open Future

Moltmann's statement that 'the Trinity is ... an eschatological process open for men on earth, which stems from the cross of Christ' suggests the openness of the future and, if the future is indeed open, then intercessory prayer is possible. Walter Wink suggests that the openness of the future means that: 'we are no longer dealing with the unchanging immutable God of Stoic metaphysics. Before that unchangeable God, whose sole will was fixed for all eternity, intercession is ridiculous. There is no place for intercession with a God whose will is incapable of change' (Wink, 1992, p.301). For this reason, as Wink observes, even a small number of people can decisively affect through their prayers the shape that the future takes, precisely because that future is not closed. The God who suffers can, if God so wills, allow prayer to change the divine being and so change the divine

activity in the world. How this might be so we will begin to investigate in the following chapters, but it is not ruled out on the grounds that God, being impassible, is incapable of responding to our prayers. The answer to the question posed by the title of this chapter is a resounding 'yes!' God *is* capable of answering prayer.

Notes

1 See, for example, 2 Chronicles 7:14; Psalm 65:2; Matthew 6: 6–8; Luke 11:1–13. These are just a few of the many texts that could be cited.

2 See p.40 above.

3 *Apatheia*, in fact, was for the Fathers as much an ethical ideal as a metaphysical concept.

4 Moltmann (1981, pp.21ff) covers much the same ground.

5 However, see ch. 7, pp.143–4 below.

6 See also Moltmann (1981, p.133).

7 Sarot (1990, p.274) cites Stott (1986, pp.155–6) as one of those theologians who reject theopaschitism as heretical while holding to a position that seems logically to entail it. Stott does not wish to restrict God's suffering to that of the second person of the Trinity. This, says Sarot, rightly, is a passibilist position.

8 See the discussion of this point in Moltmann (1981, p.35). Moltmann (1981, pp.36ff) mentions J.K. Mozley, C.E. Rolt, Miguel de Unamuno and N. Berdyaev as examples of modern writers who develop the theme of God's passion.

9 See p.70 above.

10 The concept of participating in God has been more recently expounded and at greater length in Fiddes (2000).

11 Here Sarot follows Nelson Pike (1977).

12 This seems to contradict the point that God's omnipotence must be seen in terms of persuasion rather than coercion. If human freedom is never overridden by God, it seems likely that there could be states of affairs that are resistant to the divine omnipotence. This would appear to be the case whether we speak in terms of divine self-limitation or in terms of divine self-restraint. Sarot's case therefore has its weaknesses. See Chapter 7, p.144.

13 The link between God's passibility and God's mode of existence as temporal can also be argued in this way: time and change are bound up with each other; change takes place within time, and change is also a measure of time. This means that, in eternity, where time does not exist, change cannot take place, and so nothing can ever happen. However, that God is susceptible to worldly influences (among which we must count petitionary and intercessory prayer), and in some fashion changed by them, implies that God must also to some extent and in some way be subject to time although not limited by it. The possibility exists, therefore, for God to experience events as novelties. There is a strong tradition of resistance to such a concept of God. Many would wish to argue, as has been argued frequently throughout history, that God exists in some sort of timeless eternity, so that all times are present to God and God to all times. But the price of such a theory is high, and could be considered as unacceptably high. For the effect of removing God out of the world altogether into a timeless eternity is to take away the possibility that God can in some way be influenced by the world. Since we

would wish to count prayer as such an influence, this attempt to overcome an imagined difficulty ends up by rendering prayer impossible.

14 We will see in due course that there is a need to resolve the tension between this view and that of process theology which virtually suggests that God is causally affected by the world. See Chapter 7, pp.143–4 below.

15 This seems close to Fiddes' point that to do good without feeling the pain exposes the doer of good to the charge of 'do-goodism'. See above, p.80.

16 We shall return to the theme of the world as God's body in a later chapter. See pp.126–8 below.

17 Some writers, such as Sarot, as we have seen, insist that such changes remain under the control of the divine will. We shall have cause to argue with this point of view. See Chapter 7, p.144 below.

Chapter 5

How does God Work in the World?

Asking God implies a belief that God is able to act in the world in a specific way in answer to the prayer. The expectation is that something might happen as a result of the prayer that might not otherwise have happened had the request not been made (Baelz, 1968, p.58). The only way of avoiding this conclusion is to opt for the kind of reductionist view of prayer that we have already rejected. However, if we deny that petitionary and intercessory prayer can only be interpreted as 'therapeutic meditation', then such prayer and any answers to it that can be identified will need to be considered in the light of how we understand the providential activity of God. In this chapter we shall explore the argument that an understanding of petitionary and intercessory prayer belongs within the Christian doctrine of the providence of God, and that it is, indeed, a sub-heading under that overall subject.

But an immediate problem arises. At the centre of the Christian concept of salvation there is a picture of the exalted Christ interceding in heaven. This suggests that the practice of intercessory prayer is in some way central to the Christian faith. Some would put the matter more strongly and affirm that a logical connection exists between belief in God and the possibility of divine action in the world on one hand and prayer to God on the other. Peter Baelz reports these views like this: 'prayer is the soul of the Christian religion. A man's prayer is an index of his faith' (ibid., p.7); 'what he believes about prayer reveals what he believes about God' (ibid., p.11).

The difficulty here is that this concept of divine providence has been called into question by both modern scientific discovery and modern historical understanding, let alone by much contemporary theology. The world, as both science and history describe it today, presents an ambiguous picture. Science now explains in other ways what were once taken as signs of divine activity and design. Macquarrie even goes so far as to say, 'nature hardly offers convincing evidence for even a general providence, to say nothing of one that might be supposed to concern itself with particular existences' (Macquarrie, 1966, p.220). Furthermore, our knowledge of history is too partial and fragmentary for us to be able to trace some 'grand scheme' or purpose, or to construct a metaphysic of history. Indeed, post-modern thought is suspicious of so-called 'meta-narratives'. In consequence, it might appear that we have neither the empirical evidence to support a doctrine of divine providential activity nor an apparent intellectual foundation for such a concept. It is in the light of such thinking that much modern theology also questions traditional concepts of divine providence. However, we shall attempt to show that an alternative view can be maintained as being both valid and coherent.

Furthermore, while an approach to the problem of evil is beyond the scope of this discussion, we may at least acknowledge that the presence of evil in the world also creates difficulties for a belief in providence. If God can act in the world, and if God is both almighty and wholly good, then it might be supposed that God would act to remove or at least prevent suffering. But evil persists and there are few unambiguous signs of God acting in order to deal with it. Nevertheless, the belief in providence persists, so the attempt must be made to interpret it and apply the results of the understanding so gained to the concept of petitionary and intercessory prayer.

What we Mean by Providence

A helpful modern interpretation of the concept of divine providence is that given by Michael Langford. He uses a six-fold model: the creative activity of God; the sustaining activity of God; God's action as final cause; the activity known as general providence; the activity known as special providence; and the miraculous (Langford, 1981, p.6). In the strict sense, however, 'providence' refers to the divine activities that can be classified as 'general' and 'special' providence and it to these two categories that we shall confine ourselves in this discussion.

In connection with what is known as general providence, Langford's favoured analogy lies in comparing God's activity to the movement of the tide which exerts an extended influence over a period of time and which determines the general pattern that emerges (ibid., p.61).[1] Such an analogy of providence suggests that God may influence the world through a consistent use of natural factors, and this means that an adequate explanation for every providential event can also be given without reference to God. Langford warns us that this is not the same as asserting a universal providence by which all events are determined by God (ibid., pp.75–7).[2] General providence must be distinguished from and contrasted with ordinary, non-providential natural events, including what are called 'coincidences' (that is, unexpected events which are not deliberately planned either by God or by human beings, but which happen under the ordinary laws of nature). In connection with general providence, Langford also discusses the analogy of the creative artist as a model of divine providential activity (ibid., pp.87–91).[3] He points to the particular feature of creative art whereby the very limitations of the medium become a possible source of creative response. The created order also has certain limitations with regard to what can be done with it, but within these limitations there is room for creative activity. The development of this analogy can help us understand the way God may 'steer' nature by using some of the creative possibilities present within it.

General providence also needs to be distinguished from what is called 'special providence' which refers to specific events rather than to general movements and is supposed to reflect divine specific decisions. Special providence needs also to be distinguished from the miraculous, as well as from natural events and coincidences. Langford believes that the best model we have for special providence

is that of human action, on the analogy of the relationship of the mind to the body (ibid., pp.67–71).[4] Theistic faith, he continues, also requires a view of providence as the activity of a personal God (ibid., pp.155ff). Within this there are two options, neither of which excludes the other. One of them is to see God's action confined to the personal level as God acts through persons to change the world rather than acting upon it directly. The other option sees no need to restrict God's action in this way and sees God as involved in nature and history as well as in human life.

From such an analysis it would appear that prayer and answers to prayer belong within the orbit of special providence (and also, possibly, of the miraculous). Although a direct influence is not ruled out, God may actually 'steer' nature and history primarily by influencing human persons, and one way of doing this may be as God provides, in response to prayer, the conditions necessary for certain human actions to occur. This is not to say that such actions will necessarily occur. The occurrence of any action depends upon the provision of both necessary and sufficient conditions. God may providentially supply the former, while it remains up to human beings to supply the latter. In this way both divine freedom in relation to nature and history and human freedom in relation to God are maintained and all suggestion of divine manipulation is avoided. Suggestions such as these would appear to support a modification of the theory of 'double action' which, we shall later argue, provides one of the best ways of understanding the relationship between prayer and the providential activity of God.

Providence and Prayer in Twentieth-century Thought

Karl Barth and the Hiddenness of God

No study of modern theological thought can ignore the work of Karl Barth in whose thought all doctrines are worked out in relation to God's decree and eternal election of human beings in Jesus Christ. According to Charles Duthie (1969, p.63), Barth sees the providence and universal lordship of God as being made actual in faith, obedience and prayer, and distinguishes between the concept of divine providence, Christian belief in providence and the Christian doctrine of providence.[5] Firstly, the concept of providence is seen in relation to the doctrine of creation. Creation has to do with the initiation of the divine decree, and providence with its execution and continuation (Barth, 1960, III/3, pp.3–14). Secondly, Christian faith in providence is ultimately faith in Jesus Christ rather than in a cosmic process. It is impossible to identify it with a philosophy of history (ibid., pp.14–33). And thirdly, in connection with the Christian doctrine of providence (ibid., pp.33–57), the place of the *Heilsgeschichte* is crucial: 'The one thin line in world history that leads to Christ as its goal is decisive for the understanding of God's relation to all occurrences in the world' (Duthie, 1969, p.64). God's faithfulness is indivisible, and so God is Lord not only of this special history, but of all history.

For Barth the content of this Christian doctrine of providence includes the divine preserving which maintains the creature in being and sustains its continuing identity in the face of *Das Nichtige*. It also includes the divine accompanying which respects human autonomy, but which nevertheless precedes, surrounds and follows all human activity; and the divine ruling which includes the fact that it is God's own self who is the divinely appointed goal for creatures. In all this there is the mysterious coincidence of divine and human activity: 'He makes the activity of the creature the means of His own activity . . . He gives to the creature a part in His own operation' (Barth, 1960, III/3, p.165). Duthie's view of such synergism is that it is possible that Barth is failing to do justice here to the reality and freedom of human beings (Duthie, 1969, p.68). Barth's statements here are also very general, with the result that he fails to show how this coincidence of divine and human action works out in practice.

For Barth, the God who rules the world is not the Supreme Being envisaged in some philosophies, but the God who is revealed in the *Heilsgeschichte*. World events, therefore, are to be understood in the light of the events attested in the Bible. But we cannot necessarily read the rule of God directly from world history, for God is as much hidden as revealed and we can detect only traces of divine rule (ibid., p.69). Nevertheless, there are signs of God's rule, despite this hiddenness of both God and God's activity. These signs include the origin, transmission, interpretation and influence of Scripture, the story of the Jewish people and the history of the Church.

According to Duthie, however, Barth fails to show how all this may work out in practice, and possibly also fails to do justice to the freedom of human beings, who in Barth's thought do not really appear to be involved in God's providential activity. Furthermore, Barth does not clarify the nature of the junction between divine and human action, but leaves it mysterious and unfathomable. Duthie believes that the reason for this lies in Barth's own philosophy. It is not derived ultimately from either the Bible or the Christian faith: 'Convinced of the all-embracing Lordship of God and compelled to recognise the reality of human actions within the same world [Barth] simply puts the two things together while holding fast to the transcendent character of the activity of God' (ibid., p.72). Again, any statement of a Christian view of divine providence must be able to give an account of God's relationship to events in the natural world as well as the relationship to human beings, but Barth fails to allow the world its 'relative independence' (ibid., p.74). In Duthie's judgment, it seems that Barth is over-fearful of making God the author of evil, yet God has accepted the responsibility for making a world in which evil is possible by becoming involved at great cost in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. However, Duthie believes that to develop the idea of divine involvement in the world, although it is not without its dangers, is something that can be done without compromising the divine Lordship and transcendence and makes possible a more dynamic view of history and of the world than we actually find in Barth. Duthie in fact suggests that Barth's understanding of providence could profit from the element of venture that we find, for example, in the thought of A.N. Whitehead (ibid., p.75).

Ultimately, then, Duthie considers Barth's treatment of providence disappointing because it does not really allow for human freedom and because it contains little to throw light on the hiddenness of divine activity. On the other hand, its strength lies in the recognition that a Christian view of providence can only be constructed from within the circle of Christian faith, and that it is very important in thinking about God's relationship with the world to keep in view that this is the One who is revealed in Jesus Christ. There is also value in Barth's attempt to combine the concepts of universal divine Lordship and divine transcendence. However, what is needed to balance Barth's teaching is the insight that God's grace is not only undeserved and condescending, but also persuasive and accommodating. God as love seeks to win without dominating (ibid., p.76).

So far as prayer is concerned,[6] Barth considers it to be a matter of Christian obedience to the command of God that we should pray. It is the 'true and proper work' of the Christian. It is also noteworthy that Barth believes that prayer in the first place is petition: 'In the first instance, [prayer] is an asking, a seeking, a knocking directed towards God' (Barth, 1960, III/3, p.268). Asking is the basic form of Christian obedience. However, Barth being Barth, he cannot but put Jesus Christ at the centre of his understanding of prayer, and the Christian is able to ask because all of what God is and all of what God possesses is given in the gift of the Son.[7] However, Jesus Christ is not only the one great gift of God; he is also the one great divine answer to prayer: 'In the fact that Jesus is there, the world is already helped and everything that creation needs … is already provided' (ibid., p.271). The people who are elected in and with Jesus Christ live already in the presence of the divine gift and answer which take place in him. The Church therefore does not lack anything from its Lord, but in him already possesses all the grace that God has given. Barth goes on to assert that what applies to the Church as a whole applies also to individual Christians. However, we cannot receive (in a personal way, that is, as opposed to merely having things brought about for us) unless we ask. Christian petition is therefore no more than the taking and the receiving of the divine gift and answer as it is already present in Jesus Christ, and this is for the glory of God (ibid., p.274).

As well as being, as Son of God, the divine gift and, as Son of Man, the divine answer, Jesus Christ, as the representative human being, is also the first and proper suppliant: he is the 'human asking' who intercedes on behalf of those who cannot or will not ask for themselves and are therefore not in a position to receive (ibid., pp.274ff). The prayer of the Church, which lives by Christ's intercession as Great High Priest and which prays in and with him, is a true and genuine asking because it is a repetition of his petition. This is the meaning of praying in the name of Christ. Such prayer gains its seriousness and power from the fact that it is prayer that is answered (ibid., p.277). In its intercession the Church shares in the High Priestly office and work of Christ, standing together with its Lord before God on behalf of all creation and giving voice to the groaning of creation. Through the intercession of the Christian community God finds a partner in the world which might otherwise be godless (ibid., pp.279f).

The individual Christian who prays does so as a member of this asking community and in the order of the Lord's Prayer. Such petitions can never be private petitions. Even though they may be prayed in secret, they remain the prayers of the community. Indeed, they are above all petitions *for* the community, because individual Christians can never pray more earnestly for themselves than when they pray for the community, since that community lives in its members. The asking of each member is thus an asking for all the others. Christian prayer is nothing less than the preservation of the existence of the Christian as a member of the Body of Christ (ibid., pp.280–83).

Prayer as Barth describes it is a sharing in the universal Lordship of God, who thus permits the creature to be actively present and cooperate in the divine overruling of creation. While there is no creaturely freedom that can limit or compete with the divine sovereignty, nevertheless, without abandoning the helm for a single moment, God has determined to allow the divine being to be determined by those who are God's friends. But God does not only *permit* prayer; God also *commands* prayer. Human beings are to call upon God in the real expectation that God will both hear and answer. The asking thus has both an objective and a subjective significance. Prayer is thus a real cooperation in the doing of the will of God under God's universal Lordship (ibid., pp.284–6).

Barth's account of prayer is not beyond criticism. The one-sided attempt to make petition the key to the understanding of prayer as a whole undervalues other forms of prayer and makes their relation to petition unclear (Brümmer, 1984, p.13). Again, the central place that Barth gives to Jesus Christ, turning his account of prayer into a Christological argument, means, as it also does in the case of his account of providence, that not enough justice is given to human freedom. It also means risking making prayer too much of a conversation of God with God's own self. Furthermore, when Barth asserts that 'the will of God is resolutely and finally set above the will of men' (Barth, 1957a, II/1, p.511), this might seem to contradict the assertion that God wills to hear the prayer of faith. It appears that human beings may exercise their will only within a framework that has already been fixed.[8] Prayer for Barth seems to be little more than a means of our receiving what God has already determined to give us and it may well be that we shall want to affirm more about prayer than this.

Double Agency and the Resort to Paradox

Donald Baillie and Austin Farrer both give an account of the activity of God in terms of a personalist view of reality. They conceive God's personal action as being on and through other persons. In this they are perhaps responding to the influence, originating from Buber, of the 'I–Thou' type of philosophy of the 1950s. It is possible that they were also reacting against the prevailing logical positivism of their period. The assertion of paradox may have been thought to have been a way of getting round the problem of verification.

Baillie's first account of providence is found in his *Faith in God and its Christian Consummation* (1964) in which he expounds providence in the light of

the problem of evil. The more recent view, that rather than acquiesce in the presence of evil we should resist it, is contrasted with the traditional view that everything in the universe happens in accordance with the will of an infinitely wise, powerful and loving God, implying that nothing can ever happen to God's children except that which is appointed by God's unfailing providence (ibid., pp.266ff). On this traditional view evil (including human sin and its consequences) is permitted by God, perhaps even sent as a punishment or as a form of discipline. Today, however, suggests Baillie, we offer the freewill defence as an explanation for evil, even though this may leave sufferers with the impression that the course of their lives is out of God's hands so that, while there may be divine sympathy, or even purpose, there can be no kind of divine providence watching over them (ibid., pp.284–5).

It is at this point that Baillie introduces his concept of paradox. We must be prepared to accept the paradoxical possibility that misfortunes may be sent by God unless we are prepared to give up the idea of providence altogether (ibid., p.289). Not only must we beware of holding to God's sovereignty by sacrificing God's goodness and love, but we must also avoid the opposite extreme of saying that God has limited God's own self by creating human beings with freewill. This latter view, according to Baillie, reduces God to the position of having no real control over our circumstances except in so far as God successfully exercises a moral influence over the people whose choices influence our lives.[9] Already, then, we are beginning to discern the outline of Baillie's doctrine of paradox which, he believes, runs throughout the life of faith. Paradox is seen in the polarity between the campaign for the establishing of the kingdom and the eternal reality and victory of that kingdom (ibid., p.293). It is also seen in connection with the prayer of faith, especially in the apparent contradiction between parables of importunate prayer and warning against the idea that our prayers will only be heard if we repeat them enough. Against this, we are assured that God already knows our needs (ibid., p.295).

Baillie develops his doctrine of the paradoxes of faith in his *God was in Christ* (1958). He sees paradox as present, amongst others, in the doctrine of providence (ibid., pp.111ff). He refers to 'the paradoxical relation between the vertical and the horizontal plane'. On the latter what appears is a network of cause and effect, while on the former all things are believed to come directly by God's providential appointment, although this must not be conceived in a dualistic way but rather as God simply working *through* the natural. The paradox arises because on the horizontal plane (that is, the historical) there are many elements in the network of determinants that are directly contrary to the will of God. Baillie believes it is impossible to escape from the paradox without running into a dualistic doctrine of a finite or limited God on one hand or a pantheism that explains away the reality of evil on the other. He also asserts that, although the paradox arises out of actual experience, the doctrine of providence in its fullest and most paradoxical form is peculiar to Christianity, because in the attempt to grasp the meaning of the incarnation the human mind has been compelled to accept paradox since the crucifixion of Christ is at the same time both the worst and the best thing that ever happened.

The central paradox for Baillie is the paradox of grace, summed up in the Pauline statement: 'Not I, but Christ'. It is in terms of this paradox that Baillie works out his Christology. But the 'Not I, but Christ' is also a statement of the paradoxical nature of providence. Actions that can be wholly ascribed to human decision can at the same time be ascribed to God. God's action in the world, therefore, is on and through persons. However, it remains to be seen if this view has any real content or substance. 'Not I, but Christ' is more a pious than a theological statement. Furthermore, it is of the nature of paradox that one cannot really talk about it, so that to affirm it may not really take the argument any further.

While the distinction between God's action as a primary cause and God's agency taking effect through secondary causes goes back to Aquinas, it is Austin Farrer who is the prime modern exponent of what is called the theory of 'double agency',[10] which asserts that divine agency is in principle indirect so that it may never be said that God intervenes directly at the level of secondary causes but always works through human actions. The problem with this view lies precisely in the nature of the relationship between divine and human action, what Farrer calls the 'causal joint'. This is an issue that is discussed at length by Vincent Brümmer in two of his books (Brümmer, 1984, pp.64ff; 1992, pp.108ff).

There is first of all a conceptual difficulty. In what sense can it be said that God works through the wills and actions of human beings without denying their personal integrity as agents? Does it make sense to ascribe the same action to two different agents? It was questions such as these that led Farrer to be agnostic about the 'causal joint': the nature of the relationship between divine and human action is not explained and remains mysterious (Brümmer, 1992, pp.110f).[11] Brümmer believes that the source of the problem lies in a defective concept of causality. If God's action is a *sufficient* antecedent condition for human action then there is indeed no room for human agency, but in fact the sufficient condition for a human action must of logical necessity be the choice made by the agent. However, God may still be able to provide some of the *necessary* (though not sufficient) conditions for the action other than the agent's choice, thus providing conditions for human agents to realize God's will without denying their freedom and integrity as agents.[12] Double agency, therefore, is a matter of cooperation between two agents rather that one agent using another as a tool or puppet (Brümmer, 1992, pp.113–15; 1984, pp.64–7). However, if God provides the necessary conditions for human agents to realize God's will, this may still not give us sufficient reason for ascribing such acts to God. Brümmer therefore suggests that out of the complete set of causal conditions that are sufficient for an event we may select one as being overwhelmingly the most important or significant factor in bringing the event about, thus making it possible for believers to give God the credit without denying their own responsibility (as with Baillie's 'Not I, but Christ'), and this is not incoherent. Moreover, double agency interpreted in such a way can also account for the actions of human agents who have no conscious intention of furthering any believed purpose of God but in fact achieve results that believers hold to be of great significance for the furtherance of the divine purpose (Brümmer, 1992, pp.115–18).

Another difficulty with the theory of double agency is that it might be said to make the realization of God's purpose dependent on human cooperation, so that God has no guarantee that those purposes will ultimately be achieved (Brümmer, 1984, p.67). In reply, although it might be granted that in giving human beings freedom of will God has made God's own being vulnerable to independent human action, it could be said that this is a self-imposed limitation rather than one imposed on God from outside. Nor must we underestimate God's creative ability to respond to what human creatures may do, so that even our non-cooperation may make new plans possible, although this may turn us from agents into instruments. Brümmer concludes that it is coherent to claim that God works within the natural order and through the free actions of human persons without violating either the natural order or our personal agency, and without exhausting God's infinite ability to respond adequately to us. If this is so, then it is also possible that a specific event or human action could occur in answer to prayer (ibid., pp.68f).[13]

Yet another problem with the theory of double agency lies in how we discern events as divine actions when we only observe a natural event, which we interpret as the effect of divine agency. Brümmer answers this question by referring to what he calls 'the eye of faith' (Brümmer, 1992, pp.125–7; 1984, p.69). In other words, we decide whether an event is a divine action in the light of prior knowledge of God's intentions gained from our cumulative knowledge of the divine character and purpose received within the tradition of faith. Our interpretation of the event is thus not wholly subjective. This interpretative possibility applies to all acts of God, whether they are answers to prayer, miracles or inspiration by the Spirit. However, such an interpretation of events is retrospective and not predictive, nor is it infallible, so that the 'eye of faith' is a faculty that needs the training in which prayer itself as a 'school of seeing' has an important part to play.

In the light of such arguments we may conclude that the world can be recognized as the sphere of God's providential action and that petitionary and intercessory prayer has a part to play in the providence of God. Brümmer suggests that, in the light of the theory of double agency, intercessors not only ask God to act on behalf of the persons or causes prayed for, but also make themselves available to God as a secondary cause through whom God could act in answering the prayer. As we have already noted in Chapter 3, this view implies that the effect of petitionary prayer is upon the relationship between the person who prays and God so that both are affected, rather than any change brought about by the prayer being seen as affecting one or the other but not both (Brümmer, 1984, p.59).[14]

The Interpretation of Human Experience

We must now examine the ideas of Schubert Ogden concerning the meaning of the statement, 'God acts in history' (Ogden, 1963, pp.164ff). Ogden points out that there is a distinction to be made between, on one hand, the question put in the title of his essay 'What sense does it make to say "God acts in history"?' and, on the other, the question 'Can one make sense of the statement "God acts in history"?' The issue, as Ogden sees it, is not *whether* any sense can be made of such a

statement or not, but rather *what* sense it makes. He claims that this approach to the question reflects the shift in linguistic philosophy away from verification analysis (logical positivism) to the more cautious approach of functional analysis (ibid., p.165).

In dialogue with Bultmann's critique of framing theological statements in mythological language, Ogden suggests that a way to overcome the problem might be to use analogical rather than mythological language to speak of God.[15] In mythological statements, God and God's action in history are given the same objective status as the statements of empirical science. Having the same linguistic form obscures the fact that the function of these statements is different. Theological statements are therefore often interpreted as representing God as one more secondary cause in a chain of secondary causes, and God's action as one more action alongside the actions of other causal agents. The difficulty with this view is that, in giving the same linguistic form to both theological and scientific statements alike, it opens theological language to scientific criticism, with devastating results. It must also be doubted whether mythological statements are an appropriate way of expressing the sense that theological statements are meant to express. Myth misrepresents divine transcendence because it represents God as but one item within the world. Theological statements, on the other hand, have an existential intention and present a certain possibility for understanding human existence. This insight lies behind Bultmann's attempt to find a non-mythological way to express the meaning of theological statements (ibid., pp.166–8).

Ogden believes that Bultmann's analysis of the problem and the general direction of his proposal for solving it is in general correct, but that his solution itself is problematic. The one-sidedly existentialist character of Bultmann's solution puts Christian faith in danger of becoming indistinguishable from a merely human self-understanding, and a corrective to this might be to use analogical rather than mythological language when speaking of God. Analogical language represents God's action as analogous to human action, and the relation between God and human beings as analogous to the relation of human beings with one another. By representing God as a 'personal being' acting on persons, analogy also preserves God's hiddenness and transcendence (ibid., pp.170–71).

Ogden also insists, following the view of process theology formulated by Charles Hartshorne, that this analogy should be regarded as 'strict'. That is, God is not to be thought of as an exception to metaphysical principles but rather as their chief exemplification. Ogden comments: 'If to be a self is only possible by being related to and dependent upon others, and most directly on the others that constitute one's own body, so God can also be conceived only as related to and dependent upon the others that constitute God's "body", which is to say, the whole world of created beings' (ibid., pp.175). In this context, the word 'analogy' also warns us that God is not a self in univocally the same sense that humans are selves, since the human self is related to only a very few others while the divine self is related to all others in such a way that there are no gradations of intimacy of the various creatures to it. Nor is God located in a particular space and time; God is directly present to all spaces and all times, and they to God (ibid., pp.175–6).[16]

If God's action is to be understood in 'strict' analogy to human action, however, we must be clear as to what is meant by the latter. Ogden insists that he is not simply thinking here of the self-understanding that enables human beings to carry out a particular purpose. Rather, human acts are ways of expressing the inner decisions whereby the self constitutes itself as a self. God's action, therefore, is analogous to this inner human act. The primary meaning of God's action is the act (as process theology conceives it) whereby God constitutes God's own being as God by participating fully and completely in the world of creatures, thereby laying the ground for the next stage of the creative process. It follows from this that the closest analogy of the relation of God to the world is our relation to our own bodily states, especially the states of our brains, with the qualification that God's interaction is not simply with a part but with the whole of the world. Ogden describes this interaction as being 'unimaginably immediate and direct' (ibid., pp.176–8).

Ogden has now reached the point where it is possible to ask what sense it makes to say 'God acts in history'. The foregoing argument suggests that God's action is not action in history at all, but action that transcends history, analogous to the way that our own inner decisions lie behind our outer acts. However, this might be taken as something timeless and unhistorical and even as suggesting the impossibility of any statement that God works within history. Ogden counters this by suggesting that there are two senses in which it may be meaningful to say that God acts in history. Firstly, if God's relation to the world is analogous to our own relation to our bodies then every creature may be regarded to some extent as God's act. Furthermore, human beings are able to represent or speak for the reality of the divine as the result of their self-conscious capacity to discern meaning and give it symbolic cultural and religious expression. It might even be said that human actions actually are God's actions, and not just a re-presentation of a human understanding of God's action. There are also those actions, which are peculiarly ours in a way that others are not, through which we give symbolic expression to our own inner being. These might be called 'characteristic' actions, in and through which we are uniquely represented or revealed (ibid., pp.179–81).

By analogy, it could be said that those human events which express the ultimate meaning of existence are God's act in a special sense, even though every creature is in one sense God's act. The possibility of being such a special act of God is especially open to those uniquely human events in which human beings express the ultimate meaning of their existence through symbolic speech and action. But it is not necessarily intentionally symbolic acts that have this possibility of becoming special acts of God. Indeed, according to Ogden, any event can become a special act of God in so far as it is received by someone as a symbol of God's creative and redemptive action. In other words, what is meant when we say that God acts in history is that there are certain distinctively human words and deeds in which God's characteristic action as Creator or Redeemer is appropriately re-presented or revealed. Because the transcendent action of God is re-presented through them, they are also acts of God analogously to the way in which our outer

acts *are* our acts in so far as they re-present our own characteristic decisions as selves or persons (ibid., pp.182–4).

We are now in a position to assess Ogden's contribution to the debate about the providential activity of God in a critical way. While there is much that is illuminating and helpful in his thought about the way we speak of and discern certain events as God's acts, this account of divine providence is vulnerable to criticism. It would appear that, in Ogden's thought, God's action is not in a proper sense God's at all, and to talk of God's action appears to be no more than a matter of the way we refer to certain events. Talk of God is no more than talk of our attitudes and to speak of 'providence' is simply a way of interpreting human experience. In this, Ogden seems to be affirming much less than theologians such as Baillie and Farrer affirm when they speak of the mysterious coincidence of divine and human action. On Ogden's understanding of divine action it might not be possible to say more about prayer than that it may have a place as a means of heightening our capacity to discern certain events as acts of God and to interpret them as such. Whether this is sufficiently satisfying to the religious consciousness is open to question. Furthermore, while the mind–body analogy could be fruitful in helping us to clarify a possible mechanism for prayer analogous to the way the mind responds to the body's messages via the nervous system, this latter mechanism is not fully understood scientifically and so is not really able to provide a clear model for the explication of divine activity. All in all, we must conclude that Ogden's thought is not entirely helpful to our purpose.

The Distinction between 'Master Acts' and 'Sub-acts'

We must now look at some other modern contributions to the debate about divine providence and the place of prayer within it, beginning with the thought of Gordon Kaufman (1968, 1972), who defines providence as God's 'provision for the needs of (the various) stages of historical development so that the events of history proceed in accordance with his purposes and the historical process as a whole moves towards the end he has intended' (Kaufman, 1968, p.299).

Like other thinkers on this topic, Kaufman sees human purposive activity as the principal analogy for divine providence. He believes that providence designates the way God is working out the divine purpose in the overall historical movement, meaning that, to the observer of a particular segment of history, God's providential activity may not be visible. Instead, we may need to wait until the end or goal of that process has been reached to understand its purpose, unless God as purposer chooses to communicate with us the purpose of the divine action. And it is not only the purpose, but also the way in which it is being reached, that is known only to the purposer (ibid., pp.300–302).

Kaufman believes that the traditional distinction between general and special providence raises theological problems, because the need for special providence may suggest that God's general ordering of the world is not sufficient or competent. It may also imply that God has favourites. The answer given to such objections is that providence refers to God's governance of all history so that it may realize the

divine purpose. It is not an act performed once and for all, but the continuous activity of a living agent. Such a concept necessarily requires God to respond in particular and unique ways, in the light of God's own final objectives, to each new historical situation. Special providence is thus included within general providence. Nevertheless, the concept of special providence has value in distinguishing from the ordinary course of events the moments or processes when God's otherwise hidden purposes become visible. When this happens, new and changed relationships between God and humans become possible as faith accepts such events as authentic expressions of divine activity. But such acts, although of first importance for faith, are not to be viewed as acts in which God sharply alters or discontinues the normal patterns of divine activity. Because these events relate human persons to God in decisively different ways from the ordinary events of history, they may be regarded in that sense only as 'special' acts of God. Special providence may therefore also refer to a 'special history' (*Heilsgeschichte*) through which God's character and purpose has become clear. Additionally, special occurrences such as miracles or prophecies may be seen as events which lay bare God's activity in all events. In this connection, it is important not to separate interpretation from fact. 'Miracle' and 'prophecy' are not to be seen as violations of natural law or disruptions of the historical process, but rather as theological concepts which designate those events within the natural order and historical process that lead us to believe that all nature and history are the direct expression of purposes that transcend them (ibid., pp.302ff).

A preliminary comment may be in order at this point. Kaufman seems to be putting forward a view that providence is the character assigned by humans to nature and history in general, and to certain events in particular. It is a way of interpreting reality, although it is impossible to separate the process or event from its interpretation. In this Kaufman seems to be more or less in agreement with Ogden, but it would appear that for Kaufman this is not an entirely subjective matter. Nature and history are truly expressive of the nature and purpose of God who in some sense pushes the totality of things forward. But God also requires human assistance in this, so faith that perceives the purpose of God is also required.

We turn now to Kaufman's thought concerning the meaning of an 'act of God' (Kaufman, 1972, pp.119ff). Although this concept is central to the biblical understanding both of God and of God's relation to the world, it has become problematic today because we conceive nature as an impersonal order, the genuine knowledge of which is gained by excluding any reference to a transcendent agent. Should we then affirm that God works in history but not in nature? History, however, is not experienced in isolation from nature, nor is the fundamental problem solved by this expedient, because the modern view of history precludes extra-worldly influence. This leaves us with three alternatives (ibid., pp.124f): either we understand life in humanistic terms, or we seek a reinterpretation of God, or we re-examine the notion of 'act' in order to reinterpret the concept of divine action. It is for this latter course that Kaufman opts. In this way, he believes, God can be viewed as an agent, a reinterpretation of anthropomorphic

language and of divine transcendence is enabled, and metaphysical problems with respect to God's relation to human agents are worked out more easily.

Kaufman therefore proceeds to examine the concept of an act. An act must be viewed in terms of activity that is bound together and given distinct order and structure by the intention of an agent to reach a goal. This goal-seeking characteristic of an act is to be distinguished from immanent teleology. Rather it involves an element of creativity. Agents must be capable both of formulating the intention and of working in an orderly fashion to realize the goal. Here follows a point that is central to Kaufman's argument. Acts are capable of being broken down into constituent sub-acts. There are limits to this breaking down, and there is also an upper limit to the size and inclusiveness of an act, so that a long and complicated historical process cannot be described as an 'act' (ibid., pp.126ff).

In connection with the concept of an act of God, our modern difficulties (ibid., pp.129ff) do not arise from an unwillingness to believe in a transcendent cause of events so much as from our inability to conceive these events themselves. Specifically, the difficulty lies in conceiving what might be an event occurring independently of the complex web of interrelated and interconnected acts as science and history view them. Any indeterminacy and/or creativity occur within and are continuous with this interconnected web. It is no longer possible for us to think of individual events somehow by themselves, and this is what may make it impossible for us to conceive a finite event as a supposed act of God, since an event without finite antecedents is unintelligible. To overcome difficulties such as these Kaufman proposes that we apply the relationship between 'simple acts' and overarching 'master acts' to the concept of an 'act of God' (ibid., pp.136ff). A 'master' act is that which renders a given piece of activity intelligible. Therefore the phrase 'act of God' should in the first instance be used of the 'master act' in which God is engaged, namely the whole course of history which, as portrayed in the Bible, is no mere succession of events, but is given shape and direction by the ultimate objective God is bringing about. God's act is thus the source of the overarching order of nature and history. Kaufman believes that such a conception of divine action is consistent with the modern understanding of nature as being in evolutionary development (ibid., p.139).

How, then, are we to understand the concept of 'act of God' as applied to particular events? Such an application, according to Kaufman, can be made only if we first speak of God's act in and through the cosmos as a whole (ibid., p.142). Then we might come to see particular acts of God, not as God doing something in an unexpected and inexplicable fashion, but rather as functions of, and subordinate steps towards, the ultimate divine goal. Such divine sub-acts include creation, evolution and human history. Within this sequence of events the event of Jesus Christ can quite properly be understood as the supreme act through which God makes God known. Not every event, however, is a distinct sub-act of God, but only those which move creation towards the ultimate realization of God's purposes. Nor does such an understanding undermine the unified and structural character of experience, because it views in particular the context of a more comprehensive whole (ibid., pp.145f). Kaufman admits that this is a more austere

and less pietistic view of providence than some other accounts. God works within and through the natural and historical process, without violently ripping into the fabric of history. Nevertheless, God is one who acts, and an adequate object for profound faith. Furthermore, God's action is not completely unintelligible to a mind formed by a knowledge of modern science and history (ibid., p.147).

Kaufman's view of prayer (Kaufman, 1968, pp.511–15) follows from this conception of divine action. The 'magical' view of prayer presupposes a far too simple conception of the way God acts in the world. God is not an arbitrary or unreliable agent who directly causes particular events to happen without regard to the natural and historical processes that have preceded or will follow them. Prayer, therefore, should be viewed as a personal stance towards a personal God, a conscious living in relation to God. In such a light, all of life, in so far as it is made verbal and conscious, is prayer; but deliberate prayer helps to protect the believer from forgetting that God is personal and purposive. Such a view of prayer does seem rather vague, and may also appear to be contradicted by Kaufman's approving reference (in a footnote) to Matthew 7:7–9, in which Jesus advocates a deliberate asking God for God's gifts in the confidence that God will give them.

So it must be asked, finally, if Kaufman's thought is entirely consistent. His definition of providence quoted above[17] is fairly traditional in its formulation. In his *Systematic Theology*, Kaufman holds to a sense of the personality of God, which comes out also in his view of prayer. However, in the later publication, *God the Problem*, Kaufman appears to surrender some of this traditional Christian understanding of the nature of God in favour of a more monistic view. In addition, Kaufman's doctrine of God (as it is worked out in terms of his concept of the meaning of an act of God) seems to be governed by his view of the stages of historical development rather than the other way round. It may be the case, therefore, that Kaufman's ideas are based on concepts that go beyond the evidence.

Kaufman's approach is developed by Maurice Wiles (1982, 1986), who also seeks to draw a distinction between overarching 'master acts' and 'sub-acts' and apply this to the concept of an 'act of God'.[18] God's fundamental act is the bringing into existence of the world. As a continuous process every part of it is an expression of the divine activity. Regular patterns in nature owe their existence to God's single act of creation, but their very regularity militates against the appropriateness of speaking of them as distinct acts of God. Any differences within the processes of nature are dependent not upon differing divine initiatives but upon differing degrees of human responsiveness. Wiles is therefore extremely sceptical about the possibility of affirming any event or human action in the world as a divine act. He does not think that Christian convictions about the personal character of God require the affirmation of particular divine acts in the form of special initiatives. Although these cannot be ruled out altogether, there remain enormous difficulties in integrating them into an awareness of the world that seeks to take account of recent developments in human knowledge. There are certainly insufficient grounds for claiming that miracles occur, nor can there be found any intelligible way of relating the intention of God and any human deed that might be seen as furthering the divine purpose (Wiles, 1986, pp.96ff; 1982, pp.13ff).

Wiles prefers to understand divine action in a symbolic sense rather than in terms of efficient causation. An 'act of God' is a symbol by which certain occurrences in the world are acknowledged and experienced as having a special and intimate relation to the ultimate source of love. Events seen as God's acts give rise to an experience of the world as a place where God's will can be both grasped and realized. However, this is more than a new description of an old reality; it is the emergence of a new reality by which our ideals are formed and our own action inspired. The symbol of divine action is therefore a matter of final rather than efficient causation. God affects the world not by the manipulation of events, but by making it possible for human beings to glimpse his purposes of love and to be inspired by that vision. Such inspiration of goals, ideals and the vision of genuinely new possibilities, Wiles believes, are powerful forms of action (Wiles, 1982, p.29).

In the end, what Wiles provides amounts to little more than a modern restatement of deism. He is prepared to allow God a continuing relationship to the world as a source of existence or giver of purpose to the whole, and there is a direction in events, or a kind of moral grain in the universe, but it must have a 'deistic character' (Wiles, 1982, p.15; 1974, p.38) about it in that there cannot be any effective causation on the part of God in relation to particular occurrences. He even suggests that the model of God as personal agent lies at the heart of the problems he perceives. He prefers the model of God as spirit (Wiles, 1982, pp.117ff), which stresses relatedness in personal communion with, and presence to, the other rather than active personal agency. Wiles holds such a model to be more appropriate to a proper understanding of divine action which, as we have seen, he believes to lie within the sphere of final rather than efficient causation.

Wiles' view of intercessory prayer (ibid., pp.99ff) follows from his views about the action of God. He sees prayer merely as the spreading out before God of concern for others. We should not, according to Wiles, expect such prayers to have any direct causative effect on those for whom we pray. Such an effect can take place only through the actions and wills of human beings, our own included (ibid., p.102). Prayer is simply a means of our glimpsing God's purposes and of being so inspired by that vision that we align ourselves in accordance with the will of God. God's will, however, is no pre-packaged blueprint but a more open concept in which human actions are included. Thus prayers for grace are an integral part of the search to discern and realize God's will as they bring to special awareness the presence to us of the God whose will we are seeking (Wiles, 1986, pp.103–5). Against Farmer, who believes that a change in a mental state is as real a change as any other in the world,[19] Wiles doubts that a prayer for divine grace involves essentially the same kind of divine intervention as a prayer for change in the external world. He believes that prayers for spiritual strength and enlightenment can be understood in ways that are free from the objections that there are to other forms of prayer. Praying for strength or insight is not a way of bypassing human effort; it does not involve the replacing of human activity by divine activity, but rather requires the replacement of one form of human acting by one more appropriate (ibid., p.101).

Evaluating these contributions to the discussion about providence, it would appear that Wiles, unlike Kaufman, is unwilling to admit any form of causal relation between God's master act and the particular acts performed by human agents.[20] This means that the 'causal joint' between divine and human action is no clearer in Wiles than it was in Farrer. Furthermore, Vincent Brümmer believes it to be incoherent to claim that God is both the agent of everything and of nothing in particular. He also believes that it is vacuous to claim that God's action has no particular content (Brümmer, 1992, p.120). It is possible to agree with both Wiles and Kaufman that the whole process of bringing the world into being needs to be seen as the one action of God,[21] but against Wiles and with Kaufman it is possible to make sense of the claim that particular events may be identified as acts of God. In support of this assertion Brümmer (ibid., pp.120–24) begins by pointing out that divine agency is part of the complete cause of, and a necessary condition for, the occurrence of every event; that it is never the complete cause of any event; and that it need not necessarily be held responsible for every event. The problem of deciding when to hold divine agency responsible boils down to the question of intention. God may be held responsible for those acts which are brought about intentionally, but not those events which are permitted as unintended side-effects of God's intentional acts. We have to interpret events in the light of what we believe to have been the intention of the agent. This means that we ascribe those events to divine agency in which God realizes those purposes which we may infer from the interpretative framework provided by the tradition of faith.[22] Thus the world acquires religious meaning for the believer and in such a context petitionary and intercessory prayer may also be meaningful exercises.

A Modern Restatement of the Traditional View of the Providential Activity of God

Before reaching a final view of the relation between the respective understandings of divine providence and intercessory prayer it is necessary to take into account the views of Paul Helm (1993), even though we may have reason to criticize them.[23] Helm (1993, pp.22ff) sees providence as being concerned essentially with God preserving and sustaining the creation in a purposive way. He denies that a doctrine of providence can be derived from reason alone, or even from a concept of God. It can only be derived from God's special revelation in the Bible. This immediately seems to beg the whole question and suggests a certain circularity of argument. To have a concept of revelation implies a prior concept of God's relationship to the world and to human beings in particular. One wonders if Helm is assuming from the start what he seeks to prove. Be that as it may, he says that any doctrine of providence raises problems both of knowledge and of belief. These problems include the problem of evil and the question of the relation of God's existence and activity to the existence and activity of creatures, especially human beings, so that the latter may be held to be both free and accountable. There is also the problem of identifying acts of God and the more basic question as to how any event may count as an act of God. Indeed, can God be said to act in the same way as we act? But since our actions consist of unobservable causes

together with observable effects, the same might be said of God's action. Helm concludes that there is therefore no a priori reason to suppose that God cannot act or that the concept of divine providence is incoherent (Helm, 1993, p.37).

Helm's case depends, crucially, on a distinction between 'risky' and 'risk-free' providence. He puts the question in this way: 'Does God's providence . . . extend to all that God has created, including the choices of men and women? Or is his providence limited, perhaps limited by God himself, so that he does not infallibly know how the universe is going to unfold?' (ibid., p.39).

Against perhaps a majority of modern thinkers on the subject, Helm chooses the risk-free option. Those who take a 'risk' view do so out of a concern to preserve human freedom, but for Helm the cost for a doctrine of divine providence of a non-deterministic view of human freedom is too high. He thinks that such a view involves the surrender of a degree of divine omniscience and infallibility, allows free human decisions to thwart the will of God, and removes the effectiveness of divine grace (ibid., pp.40ff). Helm also makes an important distinction between God's decree on one hand and God's will (or command) on the other (ibid., pp.47f). A 'risk-free' view of providence asserts that, while everything that occurs is decreed by God, God may not will or command all that happens.

Helm discusses the possibility that a strong view of human freedom can be combined with a 'risk-free' view of divine providence (ibid., pp.55–61). This is the position of what is known as 'middle knowledge' according to which God knows all the outcomes of all possible free choices and is thus able to bring about those circumstances in which free creatures will freely choose what God purposes. In Helm's view, such an idea is not entirely free from the suspicion of manipulation. Another difficulty for Helm is that God cannot actualize a person's free choice. Furthermore, a particular set of circumstances can never ensure just one freely chosen outcome. It can only provide the conditions for the free choice of one of several outcomes. Therefore, Helm concludes, God cannot exercise a risk-free providential control over the creation via middle knowledge.[24]

Instead, Helm favours a view of human freedom which he calls 'deterministic'. He claims that people perform free acts not only when they have the power to do so but also when they want to. Such a view of human freedom, according to Helm, is not only compatible with determinism but also with a full view of divine omniscience and omnipotence. Crucially, he admits that possible disadvantages lie in the areas of human responsibility and of the problem of evil (ibid., p.67). To the mind of the present writer this is a fatal objection. Helm's view of providence seems to call the goodness of God too much into question and fails to preserve human freedom in as strong a way as we might wish.

In his discussion of causation, Helm, like others who consider this subject, distinguishes between primary and secondary causes. These two sorts of causes are not in competition with each other. However, the primary cause is not an event in time, nor is it located within the created universe. It is, rather, an eternal cause which has the whole of creation as its effect and which also transcends the creation. On such a view of causation, God works through secondary causes which have no power independent of God's working (ibid., pp.86–7). In a later chapter

Helm discusses Austin Farrer's theory of double agency and concludes that there are difficulties with such a theory (ibid., pp.177–82). As Helm sees it, for a human action to take place the conditions that God provides within the primary order must be both necessary and sufficient, but then there would be no room for human decision. On the other hand, if a human decision provides the sufficient condition for the action, first-order causes become unnecessary. This means that primary divine causation can only ever provide the necessary conditions for an action, and never the sufficient condition, which is essentially the same position as that taken by Vincent Brümmer.[25] However, Helm finds it hard to see how there can be two separate sets of necessary and sufficient conditions for an action, the primary and the secondary. He feels that such a distinction actually solves nothing.

To sum up, Helm takes the view that God's providence extends to the occurrence of individual actions and to each aspect of each action (ibid., p.104). This requires him also to argue that such divine determination of all events is nevertheless compatible with human freedom and responsibility (ibid., pp.174ff). However, this can only be so if God shares the responsibility for human actions with human agents. If it be thought that this concedes too much, Helm replies that even on the 'risk' view of providence (in which God restricts the divine omnipotence) God is still left complicit in what occurs, presumably because God may be held responsible for God's own lack of knowledge. But in arguing thus Helm fails to take into account the distinction between God's knowledge of past and present actualities and God's knowledge of future possibilities. On such a distinction divine ignorance of the future as actuality is necessary and not merely an act of divine self-limitation. God cannot be held responsible for what God necessarily cannot know. On the other hand, while the 'risky' view of providence makes room for the so-called 'freewill defence', Helm's 'risk-free' view unacceptably compromises the goodness of God as well as human freedom.

Helm's view of petitionary prayer is dependent on his account of providence. Such prayer is considered to have causal efficacy. It presupposes that God is active in certain ways only because humans have prayed for certain things to happen. Of course, this raises enormous problems about the nature of God, God's relationship with human beings and the moral responsibility of those who pray. There are special problems for a 'risk-free' view of providence if it is held that God makes the fulfilment of the divine purposes dependent on prayer. In particular, it must be asked whether the relationship between God and humankind can ever be personal on a 'risk-free' view of providence. Of course, Helm must affirm that prayer is, or involves, a personal relation between the one who prays and the one prayed to, but he doubts whether the sort of personal relation required for prayer requires personal freedom in a strong sense. He questions the assumption that coercion or manipulation is logically incompatible with every personal relation, and also the assumption that prayer is a personal relationship between equals. He claims that there are elements of constraint, even coercion, in a wide range of human relationships, but that those relationships are not thereby made sub-personal. Therefore, for Helm, the question whether providence is risky or risk-free is irrelevant to an understanding of personal relations (ibid., p.153).

Helm's position with respect to petitionary prayer is that if anyone prays then God has ordained the prayer. It is an action within the order of divine providence like any other action. But it is also important not to separate the action of praying from the matrix of other actions and events in which it is set. If such a separation is made, and we ask what would be the case if the prayer had not been made, then we are in fact speaking about a different matrix of events and actions. Furthermore, we might not possess the information to draw any conclusions about what might or might not have happened if the prayer had not been made.

Prayer for Helm is thus a God-ordained means of fulfilling what God wills. It is 'not one means of settling God's mind on a course of action, but one of the ways in which the already settled mind of God effects what he has decreed' (ibid., p.159). He claims that the advantage of such a view is that it shifts onto God the burden of responsibility for the success or failure of the prayer in relation to the occurrence or non-occurrence of the divine action prayed for. The reason why a prayer is answered or unanswered does not lie within the benevolence of God or in the strength of the intercessor, but in the will and warrant established by God himself. On a 'risk' view of providence, on the other hand, the burden of responsibility for the success or failure of the prayer falls upon the one who prays. However, this seems open to the same objection as before, that the role assigned to human freedom is much more limited than in other views of prayer which are based on what Helm would call a 'risky' view of providence. Helm's view of prayer is too bound up with his view of providence, so that, if we judge the latter to be unsatisfactory, the same judgment must apply to the former. In short, in relation to both prayer and providence, Helm allows God to determine too much and human beings too little.

Conclusion: Prayer and the Action of God

Our discussion of providence has suggested that God 'steers' nature and history primarily by influencing human persons, and that one way this may happen is as God provides, in response to prayer, the conditions necessary for certain human actions to occur. We have concluded that the accounts of providence given by Barth, Ogden, Kaufman, Wiles and Helm are unsatisfactory to one degree or another. For Ogden, the meaning of 'an act of God' appears to be little more than the meaning ascribed to an event by human beings in the light of faith. There would therefore appear to be little room for prayer in his thought except as a means of sharpening our ability to discern and interpret events as acts of God. However, it may be possible, as we shall try to show in the next chapter, to follow through his suggestion that the relationship of God to the world may be seen as analogous to the relationship of the mind to the body, to the conclusion that there may well be, after all, room for petitionary and intercessory prayer in his world-view. Again, Kaufman's distinction between a 'master act' and the sub-acts that contribute to it is illuminating and helpful. According to Kaufman, God can 'steer' both nature

and history only by working from within the creation and not by 'violently ripping into' it. However, Kaufman's view of prayer appears not to be impetratory but merely expressive of a certain human attitude towards God. He is also somewhat vague and contradictory in the few pages he devotes to prayer in his *Systematic Theology.*

Similarly, Maurice Wiles allows prayers only for divine grace in order that the one who prays may be able both to discern God's will and to be strengthened to carry it out. His position *vis-à-vis* prayer arises from his restriction of God's activity to the overarching 'master act' by which God is bringing the world into existence. In no other respect, it appears, can Wiles allow God's action to be thought of as being causally efficient. However, God's action may provide a final cause, supplying a source of vision and inspiration that moves human beings to perform God's will, and Wiles claims that this is productive of a genuinely new reality as opposed to a new interpretation of an old one. In spite of this, there is no room for impetratory prayer in Wiles' thought.

As for views that are influenced by Reformed theology, it has to be said in the first place that it is not fully clear within the framework of Barth's thought concerning providence and prayer how God may be able to 'steer' both nature and history while working primarily by means of the divine influence exerted upon persons. The central position that Barth gives to Jesus Christ within the providential activity of God, and in prayer as both Asker and Answer, while being a strength from the Christian viewpoint, still leaves little room for human initiative and responsibility, and might give the impression that for Barth prayer is little more than God talking with God's own self. According to Barth, God as universal Lord both permits and commands prayer as a means of granting what God has already decided to give, but this means that the limits to prayer are already strictly drawn, once again severely limiting human freedom and responsibility. Like Barth, Paul Helm also allows God to determine too much and human beings too little, both in relation to providence and in relation to prayer. Helm's views also seem to compromise the goodness of God in an unacceptable way.

So finally we are left with the theory of 'double action', as put forward by Farrer and amplified and refined by Brümmer, as the best way forward for understanding the relationship between divine providential activity and human prayer. We can be particularly grateful to Brümmer for the way in which he has clarified the nature of the 'causal joint' between divine and human action. In the thought of these theologians the relationship between God and human beings, in relation to both providence and prayer, is one of cooperation rather than manipulation. On this view God, in response to prayer, influences human beings not only directly but also by providing the necessary external conditions for them to do God's will. God acts, and we both discern and interpret God's action in the light of faith, and through our prayers also offer ourselves as the human agents of God's will on behalf of the situations or persons for whom we pray. A nice balance has thus been struck between divine initiative on the one hand and human freedom and responsibility on the other. Accordingly, prayer may be said to have a very real part to play within the overall providential activity of God.

Notes

1 Langford also suggests that phenomena such as tidal bores which are caused in certain situations by the steady build-up of tidal pressure may afford an analogy of special providence, with the advantage that this does not require the introduction of any strange new factors to explain it even though the appearance is of a radical and surprising discontinuity.
2 For a contrary view, see Paul Helm, *The Providence of God*, Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993. We shall later have cause to be critical of Helm's views. See pp.107–10 below.
3 We shall return to this analogy of God as a creative artist at a later stage in our discussion. See p.133 below.
4 See also the discussion of this analogy in the thought of Schubert Ogden, pp.100–101.
5 Barth's thought about divine providence is to be found mainly in his *Church Dogmatics* (Barth, 1960, III/3, pp.245ff). The section on prayer begins at p.264.
6 In this section we shall confine ourselves to Barth (1960, III/3, pp.264–88). Other major sections on prayer are to be found in Barth (1957a, II/1, pp.510f; 1957b, II/2, pp.751ff, 763, 780f; 1961, III/4, pp.87ff; 1958, IV/2, pp.704ff; 1962, IV/3:2, pp.671f, 882ff).
7 See Romans 8:32.
8 For an amplification of these criticisms, see Hewitt (1969).
9 This, of course, may be exactly what we do want to say.
10 For an assessment of the treatment of divine agency and prayer by Farrer see Henderson, 1985, pp 223–43.
11 In this section of his book Brümmer combines a discussion of Farrer's double action theory with a discussion of the thought of M. Wiles (1986). We shall come to our own discussion of Wiles' thought on pp.106–7.
12 It is also important to avoid any hint of divine manipulation.
13 For an account in terms of the philosophy of John Macmurray of the vulnerability of God's action, see Ellis (1989, pp.225ff), in which the author argues that the vulnerability of all actions is presupposed within the concept of action itself.
14 See p.86 above.
15 Ogden wishes us to be clear that 'myth' does not include all analogical talk of God. Myth can be distinguished from analogy, and this means that the definition of myth has a restricted scope.
16 For other discussions of the concept of the world as God's 'body', see Sarot (1992a), McFague (1987), Jantzen (1984).
17 See p.102.
18 Wiles (1986, p.96) suggests that a helpful analogy of this distinction can be made through an analysis of the statement, 'Solomon built the Temple.' Solomon's was the original vision and concept, but others performed the various acts of physical labour that brought the Temple into being.
19 See the section on Farmer in Chapter 3 above, pp.47–52.
20 For a discussion of this point, see Brümmer (1992, p.112).
21 This point has affinities with the conclusion reached by John Macmurray that the world is one action. See Macmurray (1957, p.217), and the summary of his argument above in Chapter 3, pp.57–63.
22 See p.99 above.

23 It is worthy of note that few of the authorities Helm quotes with approval seem to be modern thinkers. Rather it is from the classic statements of providence by writers such as Augustine and Calvin that he seeks support for his case. The links between Helm's position and the theology of Calvin appear to be particularly strong. Most of those with whom Helm disagrees are recent authors.

24 For a full discussion of the issues involved in 'middle knowledge', see Basinger (1986, pp.407–22), the reply to this by Gordon and Sadowsky (1989, pp.75–87), and Basinger's further reply (1990, pp.267–75). The same issues are rather more inadequately dealt with in Ware (2001).

25 See p.98 above.

Chapter 6

How does Prayer 'Work'?

In previous chapters we have asked whether traditional understandings of divine attributes make petitionary and intercessory prayer unnecessary and whether the doctrine of divine impassibility makes such prayer impossible. We found convincing arguments to counter such conclusions, above all that a concept of God as personal being and of the relationship of God to human creatures as a personal relationship can provide a context for a logically coherent and theologically satisfying account of intercessory prayer. We also found that a doctrine of divine impassibility can be at least modified, if not abandoned. But now we must face the charge that traditional theism, and the philosophy that underlies it, makes the act of intercession inconceivable. If that turns out to be the case, then the further question arises whether a different philosophical foundation for theistic faith might not help us reach a more coherent understanding of the nature of petitionary and intercessory prayer. In this chapter, therefore, we shall evaluate the contribution of process theology, as proposed by A.N. Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne and their followers, to see if it contains any valid insights that might assist us in our purpose.

Does Traditional Theism make Intercessory Prayer Inconceivable?

Traditional supernaturalistic theism is based on a monarchical model of God's relationship to the world (McFague, 1987, pp.63ff). In this model, God exists independently of this or any other world, has supreme power and totally determines not only the origin and structure of the world but also the course of events within it. According to this view the world has no intrinsic power of its own to frustrate the divine purpose, and it is entirely a matter of the unilateral and voluntary divine decision whether or not to give a measure of power to creatures. This gift, however, can be withdrawn by God in just as arbitrary a fashion as it was granted, so that God is able to intervene and override normal causal processes whenever God so chooses. The implication of such a view is that God works in the world by coercion rather than by persuasion. This traditional theism also implies that God's relationship to the world is external, so that God's action is *on* the world rather than *in* it. It is also solely a matter of God's own choice whether or not God is benevolent towards, or loves, creatures, suggesting that this free act of God is also something that can be withdrawn at any time. There is nothing, on this scheme of things, to prevent God taking an attitude towards creatures that is totally different from the one that God is believed to take.

However, there is a price to be paid for such a view of God's relationship to the world. There are, firstly, ethical and attitudinal consequences. If God is other than the cosmos and normally perceived to be absent from it, then human growth can be inhibited and human responsibility undervalued (ibid., p.68). This is because the perception of God's otherness and distance from the world may lead to a lack of concern for the welfare of the material creation on the part of human beings, on the grounds that it has no direct value to God. If, on the other hand, God is perceived as being both present and active, then this may be equally inhibiting, since it may lead to an attitude of passivity and a desire to escape responsibility because it is assumed that God needs no help from human beings to care for the world. Furthermore, the ascription of supreme power to God may have the effect of sanctioning the status quo, and so promote militaristic attitudes and a sense of worthlessness that inhibits human emancipation from political oppression and intellectual authoritarianism.

More importantly for our purposes, there are also the philosophical and theological consequences of supernaturalistic theism (Griffin, 1989, pp.51ff, 129ff). These have tended over time to lead to atheism, above all because a view that ascribes overwhelming power to God raises the problem of evil in an acute way because God does not appear always to intervene to take away suffering and remove evil. Atheism has also been the result of a mechanistic view of the universe in which it is very difficult to conceive of God's action. Furthermore, supernaturalistic theism has been associated with a dualistic view of reality with its intractable mind–body problem. Dualism is unable to conceive how an immaterial, personal soul could interact with a material, impersonal, machine-like body. The result has been a tendency to deism which allows to God only the causal power to create the universe and impose upon it the laws of its operation. If God is conceived of as being able to intervene miraculously then it can only be in a way that appears to violate those natural laws.

So the traditional, supernaturalistic view of God appears incompatible with a view of the world which is built on the methods and discoveries of modern science which has no place for any concept of direct divine influence upon the world. It is plain that a view of the world that finds it difficult to conceive of God's action within it would also find it hard to conceive a place for intercessory prayer because that also requires a belief in the ability of God to act in the world. Naturally, in the light of such difficulties, it still remains open for us to interpret intercessory prayer in terms of therapeutic meditation which ostensibly requires no direct divine intervention, but we have already argued against taking such a course. Another alternative, we shall now proceed to explore, is to consider another metaphysical theory of the world which enables a revised view of God, the world and the relationship between them. Process theology offers such a reinterpretation. It asserts that God's relationship with creatures is an essential feature of the world, that this relationship is internal as well as external, necessary in some respects as well as voluntary in others. On this view God and the world are interdependent and responsibility for the cosmos and its creation is shared between God and creatures. Furthermore, process thought does not attribute all power to God,

although God's is the supreme power. It also allows the creation a degree of power that cannot be entirely overridden. In what follows, therefore, we shall describe and evaluate more fully the insights of process theology and investigate the application of process thought to an understanding of intercessory prayer.

The Understanding of Reality in Process Thought

Process theology derives from the thought of Alfred North Whitehead and has been developed to a significant extent by Charles Hartshorne. More recently, theologians such as John B. Cobb, David Ray Griffin, Schubert Ogden, David Pailin, Marjorie Suchocki and others have contributed their insights. In process thought,[1] the basic units of reality are conceived of as experiential events known as 'actual entities' or 'occasions' which exist only momentarily and which possess a subjectivity that differs only in degree from our own conscious awareness. Each of these fundamental units, through a process of non-sensory perception termed 'prehension', appropriates influences from beyond itself, including an influence from God who offers to each entity an ideal possibility known as the 'initial aim'. These units build up into societies which are the large-scale objects in the world which we normally perceive. In process thought each and every actual occasion is bipolar in character, having both a physical and a mental pole. Through its physical pole it prehends past entities in its environment as well as God. Through its mental pole it grasps ideals and values (known as 'eternal objects'). It then actualizes itself in terms of its elementary aim or purpose by creatively synthesizing these influences into an experiential unity in a process termed 'concrescence', after which it exercises a creative influence upon subsequent events as it itself is prehended by other individual entities. There is thus a threefold process of appropriating influences, self-actualization and efficient causation which is considered to apply to all individual events at every level. A consequence of this is that, in process theology, the power of creativity does not belong to God alone, but is shared with God's creatures. God provides the primary causation by initiating the process of concrescence, but other entities provide the means of efficient causation as they are prehended, that is, as they present themselves to be freely grasped hold of and objectified within the others' experience. However, it is important to realize that such causation is seen in process thought as a matter of persuasion and influence, and never as coercion (Fiddes, 1988, p.41).

It is also important to understand that in process theology God is not considered as an exception to these metaphysical principles, but rather as their chief exemplification (except that God, as the supreme and all-inclusive embodiment of creativity, is not limited spatially, temporally, or in knowledge and compassion, nor does God pass away, as with all other individual entities).[2] In process thought God prehends the world through a physical pole known as the divine 'consequent', or 'concrete', nature. In the divine mental pole (otherwise known as God's 'primordial nature') God envisages all the possibilities there are for the world and from these presents to each concrescing entity its initial or ideal aim. In short,

therefore, in a process understanding of reality God necessarily is both influenced by and influences the world but, crucially, the divine creative and providential power to influence others is not unlimited because creatures have their own inherent if limited power to actualize themselves and influence others, and this power cannot be overridden. Process theology thus sets limits to the omnipotence of God. Furthermore, the dipolar structure of process thought about God leads to the conclusion that God may in some respects be absolute, necessary, eternal and unchanging, while in other respects relative, contingent, changing and finite.

In process thought what exists eternally and necessarily is not just God, but 'God-and-a-world'. Because God is related to every creature so that all may be said to be 'in' God, the process view of the relationship between God and the rest of reality is known as 'panentheism'. Direct divine influence on all things is thus an essential feature of the universe when conceived in terms of process thought. But the way God affects creatures is not by supernatural determination from without, but by persuasion from within. Accordingly, process theologians speak of God presenting *lures* to creatures. Nevertheless, although God acts by presenting an ideal aim among the possibilities open to each concrescing occasion, it remains open to each creature which of the possibilities before it is realized. Because every concrescing occasion has some degree of freedom, with human beings having the greatest freedom to accept or reject the divine lures, process thought conceives God as the ground of human freedom. Process thinking also holds a single, all-pervasive influence to be necessary in order to account for the world's order, an order which is not perfect but is nevertheless real. It also holds, at least in its Whiteheadian form, that the realization of novel forms requires an actuality in which these previously unrealized forms could be lodged and through whose agency their efficacy could be explained: 'Apart from God as the source of previously unrealized possibilities, the creatures would be constrained to repeat the possibilities that had been realized in the past. By providing novel possibilities, God allows the present to transcend the past' (Griffin, 1989, pp.65f).

A consequence of this process view of God as one who both influences and is influenced by the world is that God cannot be conceived of as impassible. Nevertheless, it is possible in process thought to divide the dipolar nature of God into passible and impassible aspects, so that the divine primordial nature as the locus of all possibilities is untouched by suffering while the divine consequent nature is eminently influenced and affected by the world. However, this may be to drive the two aspects of God too far apart so that suffering does not touch God enough.[3] It might be better, therefore, to say that, while God is unable not to be affected by any event in principle, and is thus in this respect unchanging and impassible, God is in practice affected eminently by each event. In short, what is unchanging in God is God's ability to change. But however the point is expressed, it is hard to see how God might be influenced by prayer if, in terms of classical theism, God is unchanged by any event in the world. Because process theism conceives of God as both influencing and being influenced by the world, this might suggest a dynamic by which prayer may have an impact upon God and, through God, upon the world.

There is another aspect of process thought that may be relevant to an understanding of prayer. Earlier it was mentioned that each actual occasion or entity possesses a degree of subjectivity. On the basis of this, some process thinkers have presented a pan-psychic view of reality in which the world is regarded as an essentially spiritual matrix, with God as its 'soul'. Griffin points to modern developments in physics which paint a picture of a world of energetic events which appear to be self-moving, and to certain phenomena observed by biology which seem to demonstrate that bacteria, for example, have 'elemental forms of perception, memory, choice and self motion' (ibid., p.88). Evidence is also sought from parapsychology and the study of phenomena such as extra-sensory perception, clairvoyance and telepathy. This might seem to bring us very much onto the fringes of modern science, and it may seem that our credulity is being somewhat stretched, but the point, surely, is that such phenomena can be conceived within a process metaphysic, whereas other views of the world would rule them out. If there is evidence that such things actually occur, so much the better. The importance of this idea so far as we are concerned is that the world-view that has a place for parapsychological phenomena (whether or not they actually occur) might also enable us to conceive a place for petitionary and intercessory prayer and to give a coherent account of it.

The process understanding of the divine attributes of omnipotence, omniscience and goodness also makes its contribution to a process understanding of prayer. So far as the omnipotence of God is concerned, process theology sees God as the supreme power in the universe, but not the only power. Furthermore, God can only do what it is possible to do and cannot do what is logically impossible. Charles Hartshorne puts it like this:

> To have perfect power over all individuals is not to have all power in such a fashion as to leave the other individuals none. For to be individuals and to have some power are two aspects of the same thing. So even the greatest possible power (by definition 'perfect power') over individuals cannot leave them powerless and hence even perfect power must leave something to others to decide. (Hartshorne, 1964, p.14)

He also says that God's power 'is a power unique in its ability to adjust to others, to yield with infinite versatility of sympathetic desire to all that has desire' (ibid., p.294).

Divine power is thus not an irresistible coercive power but a persuasive influence. The lures presented to creatures by God are not so persuasive as to be irresistible, although the effectiveness of the divine lures may also be related to an element of selectivity in their pressure on the lured. In Whitehead's view, God's primordial nature is not prehended by each concrescing entity as an undifferentiated range of possibilities but rather, taking account of all that is the case, God grades the eternal objects according to their relevance for producing 'vivifying novelty' in the continuing process of creative concrescence (Whitehead, 1978, pp.164, 244):[4] 'each eternal object has a definite effective relevance to each concrescent process. Apart from such orderings, there would be a complete

disjunction of eternal objects unrealized in the temporal world. Novelty would be meaningless and inconceivable' (ibid., p.40). In spite of this grading of importance of the divine lures it remains the case that God's power is 'the power of one who is prepared with endless patience to attract and persuade until other agents are drawn into willing conformity by recognizing the unsurpassable goodness of what is asked of them' (Pailin, 1989, p.93).

This, then, is not a God who might occasionally intervene from without, as in classical theism, but a God who is a constant presence and influence in the environment of every creature who has freedom, to one degree or another, to receive or reject that influence. According to this way of looking at reality, God persuades creatures by presenting to them ever new possibilities. In a famous quotation, Whitehead describes God as 'the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by his vision of truth, beauty and goodness' (Whitehead, 1978, p.346). In the light of God's creative purposes, therefore, process theology recognizes limits to the power of God. Human freedom is never overridden, not even by God. No amount of prayer will ever be able to change this fact, in which case intercessory prayer can be conceived of as efficacious only as it serves to strengthen possibilities that are already present to the person or situation prayed for. But among the range of possibilities presented (including one 'strengthened' by prayer and/or 'highlighted' by God as the ideal possibility) the one that is eventually actualized depends on the freedom of the individual to accept or reject it.

This process concept of God's power has been subjected to critical examination by Gijsbert van den Brink (1993, pp.221ff). He discusses the process view that God possesses the greatest possible power, given the existence of other beings who possess power, with the consequence that God does not have power to determine totally all the activities of actual beings in the world. Brink believes that the conception of God's power as persuasion rather than as coercion does not follow from the sole assumption that actual beings by definition have some degree of power. An omnipotent being might still be able to bring about unilaterally some, but not all, states of affairs. Nor does it follow from the assumption that every actual being has power that an omnipotent being cannot completely determine all the activities of that being. In fact, there is nothing in the traditional view of divine omnipotence which implies that God has all the power there is. Nor, on that view, does it follow that actual beings are completely devoid of power. In short, Brink thinks that process theology obscures the difference between the *possession* and the *exercise* of power. He prefers the concept of *almightiness* (Brink, 1993, pp.183f, 255), derived from our experience of God's revelatory actions, to the traditional philosophical notion of omnipotence which, in turn, is derived from preconceived notions of God and power. Brink defines almightiness so as to include an ability to refrain from exercising part of God's power. It does not, therefore, include the ability to bring about all logically possible states of affairs. Rather, God has the ability only to do those things that are compatible with the divine nature.

As for the omniscience of God, process theology holds that God knows all there is to be known. God knows all actualities as actualities, but in relation to any future situation possibilities are known only as possibilities and not as actualities.

God does not know which possibilities will in fact be actualized.[5] The process understanding of divine omniscience thus makes God's actual knowledge dependent upon and relative to what is actually the case, and leaves room for the content of the divine knowledge to increase in the temporal sense as more possibilities become actualized.

So far as the divine goodness is concerned, process theology understands this as aesthetic in its aim. According to Hartshorne, 'The holiness of God consists … in the single aim at one primary good, which is that the creatures should enjoy rich harmonies of living, and pour this richness into the one ultimate receptacle of all achievement, the life of God' (Hartshorne, 1948, pp.127f). David Pailin describes this as 'the pursuit of ever more satisfying experiences through richer and novel forms of aesthetic creativity … identifiable as love' (Pailin, 1986, p.206). This corresponds to the well-known quotation from Whitehead, already cited, about God as 'the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by his vision of truth, beauty and goodness'. However, for process theologians the manner in which the divine goodness is understood cannot be taken in isolation from its understanding of divine omnipotence and omniscience. If it is the case that God's power is not irresistible, and if the divine knowledge in certain respects is contingent and relative, then we cannot be certain that the right or the best possibility will always be actualized for creatures. However, we can at least be certain that God as good will promote the highest cosmic good. And God's goodness is absolutely independent of all contingencies: 'Thus God will be good no more and no less if this happens than if that happens instead' (Hartshorne, 1948, p.75). What this means is that 'the concrete expression of God's love … must be relative because what it is to love in a particular situation depends on the character of that situation' (Pailin, 1986, p.149).

At this point further questions about some aspects of divine action as process theology conceives it have to be faced if we are to reach an understanding of prayer in its terms. If we affirm that God acts in the world (whether or not in response to human prayer, and only ever by persuasion and never by coercion) we have nevertheless to reckon with an apparent absence of unambiguous signs of the divine will or activity. This, together with the need to respect the real but limited freedom of human beings, has led to a notion of 'unconscious influencing'. It may be that we can get no further than a general conviction that somehow, for some good end and with some effect, God influences human decisions, while we remain very much in the dark about the actual character, goals and effectiveness of that influence (Pailin, 1989, p.157). If this is true, then this might serve to undermine the possibility of efficacious intercessory or petitionary prayer although, as we shall argue shortly, the efficacy of such prayer need not depend upon the conscious awareness in the prayed-for of any divine influence that is the result of such prayer. Of course, it may be objected that this is little short of the sort of manipulation that overrides human freedom, however much it may be stressed that God never coerces but only ever persuades. To answer such criticism, however, it is only necessary to refer to the points made by Vincent Brümmer above, concerning the distinction between sufficient and necessary causes for an event,[6] and about the

distinction between God giving things in a personal way and merely bringing things about impersonally.[7]

Pailin, however, concludes that it might not be theistically appropriate to consider that God makes a specific response to each event. This might lead to a further conclusion that there is little place for intercessory prayer within his interpretation of the process understanding of reality. Yet Pailin will allow that individuals might find that they are always faced by possibilities for enriching their experience and disturbed by pressure to take them up (ibid., p.171). He continues:

> instead of expecting God to present each person with a particular lure appropriate to her or his immediate situation, divine activity in, on, and through the process of history is to be understood in terms of an overall influence which stirs people with a general dissatisfaction at what has already been achieved and, as its obverse, a perpetual desire for what is enrichingly novel. (Ibid., p.172)

Accordingly, we might be able to reach an understanding of intercessory prayer in terms of a general divine influence. However, we may ask whether it is enough to consider the divine influence merely in general rather than in specific terms. In the quotation above, Pailin seems to affirm general providence while denying the possibility of special providence.[8] He doubts that we can expect God to present to each individual specific lures appropriate to the immediate situation. His argument here seems to be developed first from the observation that many people are not aware of any specific divine lures and, secondly, from his view that for God to make a specific response to each event is to promote a view of God as being 'fantastically busy' and as reflecting a 'fussiness and pettiness that is to be pitied rather than worshipped' (ibid., p.170). We may grant the truth of the observation concerning the lack of awareness in human beings of any divine luring, but deny the conclusion that such a lack of awareness invalidates the possibility of God making specific responses. Pailin himself admits that 'reference to (the lack of?) conscious experience to object to the notion of particularized divine activity does not prove that God does not provide a specific goal for each occasion'. Furthermore, in a footnote he quotes Whitehead to the effect that religious awareness of God is not a condition of God's function in the universe (ibid., p.171).

Pailin's opinions, therefore, appear to be inconsistent with the general view of process thought of God as directly related to all other entities in the universe and as presenting an ideal possibility in each and every situation. Given the process interpretation of reality it is hard to see how God's aim in any situation could be anything other than specific, particularly in the light of the suggestion that God grades specific lures in accordance with their importance to the lured. In fact, however, Pailin does admit the validity of criticisms that his interpretation of the process understanding of theism has little or no place for specific instances of contingent divine activity in the processes of reality (ibid., p.174). As for his argument that specific lures suggest a divine busybody, the alternative explanation (which Pailin rejects) that the possibility of specific lures expresses 'the awesome involvement of God in all events' is to be preferred. A belief that God does

respond specifically need not be considered as unworthy of the God believers hold to have been revealed to them, nor undermine 'the significance of the autonomy that creation gives to creatures' (ibid., p.170). Specific divine responses to particular situations are therefore not necessarily ruled out. It is of the nature of petitionary and intercessory prayer that it invites such specific responses, and there are theologians of the process school who do attempt to express an understanding of such prayer. Before we continue to evaluate the interpretation of intercessory prayer from a process perspective, however, we must assess some further general criticisms of process theology.

Process theology affirms that God, as the supreme cause of all things, seeks to persuade the world to an intensity of beauty and satisfaction by presenting to it at every level an aim derived from the divine vision of possibilities. At the same time, God is supremely affected, influenced and moved by the world (Fiddes, 1988, p.43) and so cannot be thought of as unchanging and impassible. The strength of this position, especially in connection with an understanding of prayer, lies in the view of God as a constant factor in the environment of every creature and of causation as a matter of persuasion rather than coercion. However, one consequence of the process view of the universe is that everything has some kind of awareness or feeling, and some may find this pan-psychic view of reality somewhat implausible (Wiles, 1986, p.32). Furthermore, in making creativity the supreme value it is possible that something of the freedom of God in creation is lost, although it might be said against this last point that the fact that God is unable not to create need not actually be interpreted as imposing a limit on God. Another criticism of process theology is that, if the world is an inevitable emanation of God's goodness, it is hard to conceive of a real interaction between the Creator and the creatures (Helm, 1993, p.73). Keith Ward (1982, p.228) thinks that the process view which attributes to actual occasions all the choice and creative activity there is turns God into little more than a 'cosmic sponge' who cannot do much for the world other than incorporate its feelings into an aesthetically perfect memory. However, this view undervalues the importance of the primordial aspect of God for Whitehead and other process theologians.

What about process theology's affirmation that God is always offering to each occasion an ideal possibility for the future? Maurice Wiles (1986, pp.76f) asks what is meant in this context by 'offering'. Does it mean anything more than that such an ideal possibility always exists and, with a range of possibilities presented, how does an entity know which is the ideal? Wiles thinks that what is required is some kind of emphasis to be given by God to this ideal possibility, otherwise what is described as divine action might be nothing more than a general description of the conditions under which anything occurs at all. But process theology does conceive a positive element of luring by God, and allows for an emphasis to be given to ideal possibilities, so that they could in some sense be said to be 'highlighted' and in this way appears to offer what Wiles is asking for. Wiles continues his criticisms by suggesting that, if God is always offering an ideal possibility among other possibilities, the difference in outcome of different occasions would seem to be due solely to creaturely freedom of choice, providing little room for particular acts of

divine grace (or, we would add, those particular instances of divine action that answers to intercessory prayer would require). But again, this criticism seems to overlook the way process thought allows for the ideal possibility to be emphasized or highlighted. Wiles also asks if process theology, in affirming the absoluteness of the risk taken by God in creating a world, has any conception of an ultimate fulfilment of the purposes for which the risk was taken. If not, then this would appear to exacerbate rather than alleviate the problem of evil (ibid., p.50). However, process theology does in fact offer a formal divine goal of aesthetic enrichment.

Process theology also insists that the concept of the dipolarity of God shows how God can be God while being aware of suffering. We have already mentioned Fiddes' criticism that to suppose that God is passible in the divine actuality but impassible in the divine existence is to drive the two aspects of God too far apart, so that suffering does not touch God enough.[9] However, this problem could be overcome through a synthesis of the primordial and consequent natures of God. Fiddes thinks that, if this synthesis takes place within the consequent nature of God, God's primordial nature will be left untouched by the world, but if it takes place in God's primordial nature, a denial of transcendence could be implied (Fiddes, 1988, pp.126f). However, Whitehead (1978, p.88) proposed that the two natures of God are brought together in a creative synthesis of the divine primordial and consequent natures (which he termed the 'superjective nature' of God) through which God's initial aim for creatures is formed. However, this synthesis refers only to God's envisagement of possibilities, and describes the objective immanence of the primordial nature of God in the initial aims of actual occasions. Too much weight should not therefore be placed upon this concept of the superjective nature of God, which is found only once in Whitehead's entire work, otherwise the dipolar concept of actual entities and God with which Whitehead is working would be undermined.

Although some theologians believe that it is better to affirm the strong sense of creaturely freedom and creativity that is maintained by process theology within a more traditionally theistic framework, this may be to ignore some of the problems found within that metaphysical scheme and be an attempt both to have one's cake and to eat it. Nevertheless, the concept of Creator and creation as responsive to each other and bound together by mutual influence, and the stress on divine influence through persuasion rather than coercion, is an attractive one as well as being religiously satisfying. These latter concepts, as we saw in Chapter 3, were also urged by theologians of the personalist school from their standpoint within a more traditional theism.

Spirituality in Process Thought

John B. Cobb

It seems that, while few philosophers of the process school show any interest in issues of spirituality in general, let alone prayer in particular, there are some who

write from a more theological outlook who appear interested in such matters. One such is John B. Cobb (1966, pp.225ff), who, following Whitehead, affirms that God is a decisive factor in the creation of each new occasion. However, what it finally becomes is determined by its own decision, although that it occurs at all cannot be determined by itself but only by God. We know God, therefore, as the ground of being. But God is also the ground of purpose and order: 'That our environment provides an order that makes possible intensity and continuity of experience is also the work of God. God so adjusts the ideal aim of each occasion as to achieve relationships of social order and personal order' (ibid., p.227).

However, Cobb believes that the experience of God as ground of being, purpose and order cannot be called a religious experience as such. In such a case, rather than consciously experiencing God, we are experiencing the results of God's work and such experience may be interpreted without reference to any ground. Nevertheless, it may still count as a secondary experience of God, since we do not have it in abstraction from all interpretation, but in fact have it within the context of a theistic vision. Even so, it is this interpretive element that predominates in such cases.

The primary factor in the experience of the relationship between God and human beings is God's provision to each occasion of its initial aim, as well as other possibilities. However, Cobb's consideration of Whitehead's thought leads him to suggest that Whitehead separates the primordial and consequent natures of God in too sharp a way. It is misleading, Cobb thinks, to conceive the human prehension of the consequent nature of God as if it were separable from the prehension of God's primordial nature. As we saw above, it is in fact the case that we prehend God's initial aim for us through a synthesis of the divine primordial and consequent natures called the superjective nature. This may be the basis of Cobb's wish to distinguish between our prehension of God's aim for us and our prehension of all other aspects of God (ibid., p 230). As the prehension of God's initial aim for us normally occupies the extreme fringes of our consciousness, Cobb suggests that the consciousness of God in a focused sense may usually be associated with prehensions of the divine other than the derivation of an initial aim (ibid., p.231). However, because consciousness is a very special and limited feature of human experience, the failure to experience God consciously does not mean that we do not experience God at all, although Cobb also warns that the constancy of the divine presence does in fact militate against our consciousness of God (ibid., p.232).

It is in fact the case that all experience, and not simply the prehension of God's initial aim, can be interpreted without reference to God's presence. However, those who do interpret their experience in terms of the divine presence find that their interpreted experience is dimly qualified by that presence. In terms of process thought, the point can be put like this: 'the causal efficacy of a past occasion for the present one in every other respect than the initial provision of the aim is affected by the aim of the new occasion, and in the human occasion the structure of belief affects the aim' (ibid.). In other words, the consciousness of God's

presence is determined in part by belief in it. Those who deny the presence of God form their subjective aims so as to reduce the efficacy of that presence for them, although God may never be totally excluded. Those who affirm it may so form their subjective aims that God's causal efficacy for them may be maximized. Thus faith may lead to its own verification in experience.

So far as experiences of the holy are concerned, Cobb suggests that in this case the causal efficacy of God for the becoming occasion exceeds in importance for its satisfaction all other occasions combined. However, as we have already noted, such experiences are susceptible of interpretation in other terms. Moreover, the ontological possibility of experiences of the holy does not determine whether they actually occur (ibid., p.235). Nevertheless, it is possible to elucidate the conditions that are most likely to lead to a heightened consciousness of God. These include downvaluing the causal efficacy of the body to bring the unconscious side of our experience into dominant awareness; the divine initiative expressing God's intention to be prehended in a certain way; and the mediation of sensory objects and physical movement as a means of evoking an awareness of God's presence (ibid., pp.235–8). In addition, there is a further dimension of belief about God that has profound importance for the human experience of the divine: the belief that God experiences us (ibid., p.244). Believing that we are known by God can transform our experience. Cobb expresses the point in this way: 'If we believe that God knows us in such a way that he knows our subjective aim and its relation to the ideal possibility with which he has confronted us, our motivation gains in our own eyes an urgency otherwise lacking' (ibid., p.245).

Cobb has gone to great lengths to show the complex relationships between religious belief and religious experience. Although he does not directly deal with prayer it would nevertheless be possible to argue for a conception of prayer that belongs both to our conscious awareness of the divine and also to God's awareness and experience of us. This is not yet petitionary or intercessory prayer, but a conceptual framework does nevertheless exist for its fuller application.

The World as God's Body

We must now take up another avenue of enquiry in order to elucidate the place of prayer within a process view of the world. This is to follow up the implications of the view of the divine which sees God as the 'soul of the universe' and, correspondingly, the world as 'God's body'. Marcel Sarot (1992a), for instance, argues for a holistic model for the corporeality of God.[10] He prefers to base his argument upon the concept of personhood rather than on the analogy of self:body::God:world. He argues that, although traditionally God has been regarded as incorporeal, God is also known as personal and persons we know are all embodied. If God can be regarded as the soul of the world and the world as God's body then God's knowledge of the world will be analogous to our direct and immediate awareness of the insides of our own bodies.

Another writer who believes that, given the contemporary holistic understanding of personhood, an embodied personal God is more credible than a disembodied

one is Grace Jantzen (1984). Following Jantzen, McFague (1987, pp.69ff) is yet another who 'experiments' with the 'metaphor' of the world as God's body. She thinks that this is a way of overcoming the externality of God's knowledge and activity in the world and of speaking about God's agency in a non-interventionist manner (ibid., p.200, n.12). She points out that metaphors or models are not descriptions. The drawback of the metaphor of the world as God's body is that it verges on giving God too great a proximity to the world, in contrast to the other, traditionally theistic, metaphor of the world as a king's realm which puts God at too great a distance from it. If the latter metaphor tends to deism, then the danger of the former is that it tends to pantheism. But this need not necessarily be the case. We ourselves do not totally identify ourselves with our bodies and are able to distance ourselves from them, to speak and reflect about them. This suggests that God need not be totally identified with the world as God's body. In order to avoid pantheism altogether it will help if we put other personal metaphors of God (such as God as Mother, Lover and Friend) alongside the metaphor of God's body. Like process theologians, McFague prefers the term 'panentheism' as a better way of describing God's relationship to the world when the world is conceived metaphorically as God's body. This is more than mere playing with words because panentheism is not a form of pantheism, but rather a separate option alongside theism and pantheism.

The metaphor of the world as God's body also puts God at risk, and makes God both dependent (although not as dependent as we are on our bodies) and vulnerable to suffering. It also makes God responsible for what happens in the world in a way that some other models do not. Furthermore, it means that God knows the world more immediately, internally and intimately, so that God's knowledge of the world is not 'information about' but rather 'knowledge by acquaintance'. Such knowledge is intimate and empathetic, closer to feeling than rationality. Similar considerations apply to the concept of God's action in the world. On this model the divine activity also is interior rather than exterior. God acts in and through the incredibly complex physical and historico-cultural evolutionary process. This does not mean, however, that God is reduced to that process; God remains an agent whose intentions are expressed internally in the universe and who acts by persuasion and attraction.

All this raises the important question as to whether the metaphor of the world as God's body removes human freedom. Are we reduced to being merely parts of the body? McFague replies that we appear to be special in that we are embodied spirits in the larger body of the world which influences us and we influence. We thus belong on both sides of the model/metaphor/analogy self:body::God:world. In turn this means that the experience of God's presence is the experience not of submission but of encounter with another Thou. We are creatures with a special kind of freedom to participate self-consciously (as well as to be influenced unconsciously) in the evolutionary process. In fact, we are that part of the cosmos where the cosmos itself comes to consciousness. This has the corollary that we have a special kind of responsibility *vis-à-vis* the creation, particularly in relation to the vulnerable and the oppressed.

As McFague points out, this model of God as the soul of the universe and the world as God's body occurs with particular frequency in the thought of process theologians. From this latter perspective, Griffin (1989, p.5) writes of 'a cosmic soul as a natural reality and its interaction with the world as a part of the natural process'. Later, he writes that the post-modern world view 'makes it natural ... to think of God, the cosmic mind or soul, as immanently influential in every part of the world. God's pervasive influence throughout every level of the world is analogous to the mind's pervasive influence throughout its body' (ibid., p.66).

This mind–body analogy is also taken up by Schubert Ogden in the important paper we discussed above, in Chapter 5 (Ogden, 1963, pp.164ff).[11] Ogden calls the question of analogy the most complex and difficult question the theologian faces. It is widely believed that the classical theory of analogy cannot be maintained because it fails to solve the problems it purports to solve, oscillating between the extremes of anthropomorphism and agnosticism. Ogden holds that this problematic character of the classical theory of analogy is entirely of a piece with the problems posed by classical theism in general. His solution is to restate the theory in terms of what he calls Hartshorne's 'neo-classical' theism. God is then to be conceived in 'strict'[12] analogy with the human self or person. If to be a self is possible only by being related to and dependent upon others, and most directly on the others that constitute one's body, so also God can be conceived only as related to and dependent upon the others that constitute God's own body, that is, the whole world of created beings. Ogden also reminds us that in this context the word 'analogy' warns us that God is not a self in univocally the same sense as human beings. The human self is related to only a very few others, while the divine self is related to all others in such a way that there are no gradations of intimacy of the various creatures to it. Nor is God located in a particular space and time; God is directly present to all spaces and times, and they to God.

The closest analogy to the relation of God to the world, therefore, is our relation to our own bodily states, especially the states of our brains. As Ogden says: 'We respond with virtual immediacy to the impulses that come from our brains, and it is over our brains (or their individual cells) that our decisions as selves or minds exercise a virtually direct power or control' (ibid., p.187).

If we now juxtapose Cobb's exposition of religious experience with the view of God as the soul of the world it is possible that we may have grounds for a conception of prayer that belongs to the conscious awareness of the divine and which allows for the Creator's response to messages from human creatures analogous to the way in which the mind responds to messages from the body via the nervous system. Nevertheless, a note of caution is in order. Although this model of the relationship between the mind and the body is an attractive analogy of the panentheistic relationship between God and the world, it does have its drawbacks. While it well illustrates how God may be said to be aware of the world, nevertheless the ways in which our minds influence our bodies may not be fully understood scientifically. This means that the analogy of the world as God's body cannot provide a fully clear model for the explication of divine activity in terms of God's relationship with the world.

Prayer in Process Thought

Norman Pittenger

Proceeding now to a description of prayer in terms of process thought, the first writer we must consider is Norman Pittenger (1969). In the opening sections of his book he deals with many of the issues already dealt with here: the process view of reality, what it means to speak of a personal God, and God's providential action in the world. In his chapter on prayer, Pittenger relates prayer to the relationship between the fully personal God and the 'becoming personal' human being, a relationship in which there is giving and receiving on both sides (ibid., p.148). At the beginning of this relationship God is the giver and we the recipients, but God is also affected by the response we make to the divine initiative. It would be wrong, therefore, to see prayer as a purely human enterprise in which nothing really happens from God towards human beings. Prayer is not just a matter of how we think and feel; it also makes a difference to God, who is enriched by what happens in the world (ibid., p.146). Prayer for Pittenger is also linked with desire. God lives with an intensity of desire which not even the most passionate of human beings can equal. In this light, the basic point of prayer is that it is a union of our desire to be fulfilled in God and God's desire to be fulfilled in us. Thus prayer is turned into the demanding and possibly painful exercise of aligning our desires with the purposes of God (ibid., pp.149f).

Pittenger claims that it is easy to see how prayer changes those who pray. The point of prayer is found in the relationship to God, and attending to God will have a profound effect on people who pray (ibid., p.152). But how is God changed? Pittenger's reply is to say that, through God's own relationship to the world, God is given further opportunities to create greater good and to implement such good as is already there. Such opportunities would not be available to God without the consentient acceptance that the world can give, because God's way of acting is not by coercion but by persuasion (ibid., p.153). Things do therefore happen in the world as a result of prayer: 'There is absolutely no reason whatsoever for thinking that the created order is not patient of pressures upon it, workings within it, and influences operative through it, which can and do produce fresh and unexpected events' (ibid., p.157). God is thus open to receive all decisions and to use them for the accomplishment of the divine purpose as those occasions become available to God. God does take up every request or desire that is offered, but acts only on those which are in accordance with the divine will for the fulfilment of creatures, which is their growth into personhood. It is also through prayer that human desires are purified, as human praying is balanced by the constant recollection of God as love (ibid., pp.158f). This means that we should be prepared to grow in our manner of petition and intercession.

Peter Hamilton

Another writer who attempts an exposition of prayer in terms of process thought is Peter Hamilton (1967). He defines prayer as follows:

> Asking and waiting for the help and guidance of the God whom we find, in one sense, *in* the problems of daily life – and, as process thinking urges, deeply affected by them – yet in another sense, transcendent to these problems, and waiting to influence and guide us towards those solutions that best accord with his loving purposes. (Ibid., p.244)

Citing Whitehead's 'theory of prehensions', he thus suggests that one way in which we may prehend God is as we pray for grace and guidance (ibid., p.179). The process view of reality implies that God and our problems deeply affect each other. In prehending God we prehend one whose consequent nature is affected by our problems, whilst God's primordial nature, combined with it in the divine superjective nature, is ever supplying just those initial aims which could lead to their solution. Belief in prayer is a belief that problems are often best solved 'tangentially' via God rather than directly. In other words, we prehend God in the context of the problem before we face the problem head-on. Furthermore, because our problem has been prehended by God into God's consequent nature it is possible to say that the meanings of pray and prehend overlap. Such an interpretation of prayer in process terms relies heavily on the belief that every entity affects all other entities: we are all interdependent. For these reasons Hamilton believes that process thinking offers us a form of belief in the living God that can make prayer a meaningful activity, as well as providing a basis for clarifying the nature of prayer (ibid., pp.245f).

Marjorie Suchocki

One of the most important accounts of prayer in terms of process thought is that given by Marjorie Suchocki (1989, pp.217–24). Her starting point is the call to work for the coming of God's reign. However, as individuals we cannot possibly answer the magnitude of that call. Neither can we see ourselves apart from others, since the fragmentation of each answering the call in isolation is in fact antithetical to the reign of God. Therefore we must contribute to others and receive from others across the whole extent of the work. One way of doing so is by prayer:

> Prayer is vital to the coming of God's reign. Through prayer, we enlarge the effectiveness and scope of our work in the entire task. Also through prayer we bring to conscious realization the unity that belongs to all Christians by virtue of our identity in Christ. Finally, it is primarily through prayer that the reign of God finds an avenue for its finite mode of actualization in history. (Ibid., p.217)

How can this be so? Firstly, in connection with the enlargement of the effectiveness and scope of our work, Suchocki refers to the constant presence of God and God's provision at every moment of an aim directed towards our good, an aim which is in fact oriented towards the world around us. Prayer can heighten our attunement to that aim, but we might first need to screen out the distractions of our surroundings through the more meditative forms of prayer, because those distractions tend to reinforce the hiddenness of God's aim. Here Suchocki is

making a very similar point to that made by John Cobb[13] concerning the downvaluing of the causal efficacy of the body in order to bring the unconscious side of our experience into dominant awareness. Suchocki may also be hinting here at one way in which prayer changes the world. It does so by changing us. In a process universe, no action, including prayer, is without effects and God weaves those effects into the total fabric of the divine purpose. But Suchocki also sees prayer as participation in God's aims for others in a direct way. The initial aims God gives a person are woven from the realities of that person's circumstances. When a person is prayed for, a new positive reality is introduced into the situation. Through their prayers, those who pray add to the material world with which God works in providing redemptive aims. Because they pray, the prayed-for can receive possibilities that are stronger than they would have been had those who pray neither prayed nor cared. These possibilities must always be possible within the primordial nature of God. Intercessory prayer thus serves to make certain possibilities more probable.

Intercessory prayer thus changes the world in a literal sense because people who pray are part of the world. As they direct themselves through God to particular situations they become part of those situations which in turn become, as a result of the prayer, different from what they would be if the prayer had not been offered. In a process universe everything that happens in the world matters. God works with what is in order to lead the world towards what it can be. To pray is to change the way the world is by adding that prayer to the reality of the world. Because prayer is added to the world, the likelihood of some possibilities increases. As we pray, we also change the world by changing ourselves in our deepest orientation and with that change we alter the total situation with which God works. Suchocki warns us, however, that this process can also work in negative ways. Referring to the petition in the Lord's Prayer about forgiveness, she remarks that, since God works with what is to bring about what can be, attitudes of hostility or resentment – a lack of forgiveness towards another – can have a real and negative effect on that other person. Again, there are further implications of the view that through prayer we change the world first of all through a change in ourselves. Suchocki asserts that openness to God and to the welfare of others in prayer can create a readiness for further action. Prayer is thus a form of action that yields to still further forms, and these are an extension of the prayer. God uses prayer not only in direct reference to the kinds of initial aims offered to the person prayed for and others involved in that whole situation, but also with reference to further aims offered to the one who prayed in the first place.

At the end of her account of prayer, Suchocki returns to the theme of the coming of the reign of God. In prayer the future reign of God finds its realization in the present:

> Through prayer we open ourselves to the divine will so that the guidance fashioned for us in heaven might be felt and effected on earth. We change the world by molding the world toward the divine concern for well-being in justice, renewal of nature and openness and peace among all peoples. (Ibid., p.224)

Thus, through prayer, we risk being open to the coming of the reign of God. As we seek in prayer to be conformed to God's purposes, this brings us to the 'startling possibility' of revaluing our ability to work in a significant way for God's reign. Prayer is a 'catapulting activity', pushing us to appropriate action in the world. Prayer thus unites the two modes of God's reign, the ultimate which is our destiny and the secondary which is that anticipated in history. Prayer is the avenue whereby we open ourselves to the power of God in the world.

There is no doubt that Suchocki has given us a convincing, if rather verbose, account of petitionary and intercessory prayer from a process perspective. She has shown how it is possible to conceive of prayer as changing the world as well as the one who prays. She also insists that a further consequence of praying is that the person who prays must be involved in appropriate action in relation to the situation prayed for in ways beyond that of merely offering the prayer. Indeed, it is God's activity that furthers this possibility. In essence, therefore, Suchocki's process interpretation of prayer does not differ greatly from that of Pittenger or Hamilton, although she extends it considerably.

New Possibilities for God?

Some might think that the accounts of prayer described above make it little different from the so-called 'power of positive thinking'. Nevertheless, they do indicate how process thought can illuminate the mechanism by which prayer makes its effects. It does so through God. But process theology also suggests that God is changed because of the prayer, and this raises a number of critical issues that we must address before leaving the subject of prayer in a process perspective. One of these is whether prayer can ever bring about new possibilities for God.

As we have seen, process theology insists that God only ever works by persuasion and never by coercion, so that human freedom is never overridden. This means in terms of process thought that, even if in some way the ideal possibility is emphasized over other possibilities, it is still within the freedom of the person to accept or reject that possibility or reject it in favour of another. Furthermore, in process theology God has perfect knowledge of actualities as actualities and possibilities as possibilities. It follows from this that God's knowledge of what is actual is in practice contingent and changing with time, since God cannot in relation to any future situation know which possibilities for that situation will become actual. This, in turn, may also imply that the totality of the divine knowledge increases because no future situation can be fully determinate. Although in relation to each stage in history God is perfect, God nevertheless has future possibilities still to experience as they are actualized. As these possibilities become actual they contribute something new to God's experience since, although God knew its possibility before, it was not known as an actuality. It follows from this that, if God is the origin of ever new possibilities for the world, God must also be the origin of new experiences of actualities for God.

However, there are some theologians who go further than this and propose the possibility of novelty in God's envisagement of possibilities. Fiddes (1988, pp.93ff) suggests that there may be new possibilities for God in two senses. Firstly, there may be new possibilities arising from the interaction of the Creator and creatures as the latter exercise their influence upon God but, secondly, there may be new possibilities that God conceives spontaneously from the divine creative imagination as the work proceeds. In this Fiddes receives support from Ward, who asks: 'may there not be in God an element of creative spontaneity, so that he can freely generate new ideas, just as a human artist creates new tunes or patterns of colour?' (Ward, 1982, p.154). Ward believes that there can be no sum total of eternal ideas, but rather a constantly changing stock of imaginatively created ones which are limited only by God's character as wise, good and loving. He thinks that new possibilities can come into being because possibilities exist only in so far as they are conceived by the divine mind. So long as God can change, there is no difficulty in that God should come to conceive new things. The future is therefore truly open and undecided, even in thought. The Creator will not only be ignorant of what will be actual in future; God will not even know everything that is possible.

The concept of God as the Supreme Artist is also developed by Fiddes as he draws our attention to the originality of the artist in imagining new details:

> in [God's] interaction with the world new, specific possibilities arise which he does not know either eternally or ahead of their time … these are a blend of the effect of his workmanship upon him *and* his own spontaneous imagination of new possibilities … At any one point in time, God knows all the possibilities that there are to be known, but he does not know possibilities that have not yet been creatively thought of, and which do not therefore exist. (Fiddes, 1988, p.97)

The difficulty with such ideas is that they are inconceivable so far as the strict process view of reality is concerned. In Whitehead's view, nothing can ever be a possibility unless it is envisaged somewhere. *All* possibilities are, in fact, lodged in the primordial nature of God. No new possibility can ever therefore be created. However, new possibilities can certainly come into being *for us*, but only because, as possibilities, they *already* exist in the divine mind. The view that new possibilities may arise even for God is mistaken in terms of the process view of reality proposed by Whitehead. However, in this matter Whitehead is opposed by Hartshorne, who denies that all possibilities were envisaged by God in the divine primordial nature and proposes that 'emergent possibilities' may arise from the creative synthesis between God and the world.[14]

If the concept of novelty in God's envisagement of possibilities is a real one, it may also be possible to make the plausible suggestion, however tentatively, that prayer may stimulate creative 'possibility thinking' within God. It may then be possible to suggest that novel possibilities could be presented to the world that had not been envisaged by God before the prayer was made. Prayer, so conceived, could thus be seen as contributing to the rise of new possibilities for God which

are then incorporated into an ideal aim for the situation prayed for, and which God then presents to that situation to be freely accepted and actualized or rejected. However, this view cannot be supported in terms of strict Whiteheadian metaphysics. While we remain within those parameters it is not possible to propose more than that prayer may make certain possibilities stronger. Prayer as this version of process theology conceives it can have the effect only of making some things more probable. This may be enough for our purposes. However, if we follow Hartshorne, it may be possible to say more than this, namely that prayer may open the door to possibilities not previously envisaged by God.

Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter we have attempted to show how it may be possible to apply process thought to an understanding of petitionary and intercessory prayer. Various ideas have been explored in this regard. One of them was that a coherent understanding of intercessory prayer might belong within a conscious awareness of the holy and be part of a divine–human relationship conceived in terms of the analogy of the mind to the body. Without discarding this idea, however, a more fruitful approach might be in terms of the way process theology sees God as being influenced by the world as well as influencing it. This is a complex interaction, with God influencing creatures who change as the result of a free response to God's influence, these changes in creatures in turn causing further changes in God who is influenced by the changes that have taken place in creation. Prayer may be seen as belonging to this interaction of God and humans. It is part of the human response to the influences God brings to bear upon them and, in addition, it also exercises an influence upon God and, through God, on the situations prayed for.

In the language of process theology, the matter can be put in this way: prayer is a way of prehending God who has already prehended the situation for which we pray. Our prayer becomes part of the situation that is prayed for as God incorporates it into the ideal aim that is presented in that situation. God thus uses our prayers for others to make available to them an aim that has a stronger likelihood of being accepted and actualized by them than would be the case if the prayer had not been made, although they remain free to realize or not realize the aim. This freedom may actually account for the difficulty in identifying so-called 'answers' to prayer which may, in fact, be few and far between and possibly more likely within the community of faith where there is at least a conscious predisposition towards responsiveness to the divine lures.

Prayer may also be held to heighten our attunement to the ideal divine aim in a given situation as it provides a way of opening ourselves up to God to become aware of the divine will and also of making ourselves available to God for the accomplishment of that will. By making us more ready to cooperate with God, prayer can thus become a stimulus to our own action. Furthermore, if the act of praying itself is seen as a response to a divine 'lure' then the initiative in prayer belongs to God. It may be that, in relation to a given situation, the ideal possibility

for a person not directly involved is that prayer should be offered, although action in relation to that situation in addition to the prayer should not be ruled out either.

It is to be hoped that this chapter has shown that a consistent and coherent account of intercessory and petitionary prayer can be given in terms of a process metaphysic, and in such a way as to overcome many of the objections that arise when such prayer is conceived in terms of classical theism. In the process world-view, as we have seen, every entity affects all other entities to a greater or lesser degree. On that view, God cannot but be aware of all prayer, which must affect God in the same way as does everything else. Such a way of conceiving reality enables us to see how our prayers, as well as having an effect upon ourselves, may also have an effect upon God, who is enriched by our praying, and, through God, upon the world. As Marjorie Suchocki put it: 'to pray is to change the reality of the world by adding prayer to the reality of the world' (Suchocki, 1989, p.220). Prayer is thus not a pointless exercise. We do have reasonable grounds to pray to an omnipotent, omniscient and perfectly good God when such a God is conceived in terms of process theology.

Notes

1 This description of process theology is based on Griffin (1989, pp.64ff).
2 In Whitehead's thought, God is conceived as an actual entity; in Hartshorne's, as a society of entities.
3 See the assessment of the process treatment of divine passibility in Fiddes (1988, pp.21f, 123–35).
4 For a commentary on Whitehead's thought concerning the selectivity of the divine lures, see Pailin (1989, pp.64, 140).
5 As has already been suggested, the effect of intercessory prayer may be to make some possibilities more likely to be actualized.
6 See above, p.98.
7 See above, p.42.
8 See pp.92–3 above.
9 See p.118 above.
10 See also p.84 above.
11 See pp.92–102 above.
12 Here 'strict' reflects the view of process theology that God is not to be treated as an exception to metaphysical principles, but is rather understood to be exemplifying them.
13 See p.126 above.
14 See the account of Hartshorne's thought on this matter in Fiddes (1988, p.96).

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Chapter 7

Towards a Theology of Intercessory Prayer

It is plain from the foregoing chapters that an understanding of the nature of petitionary and intercessory prayer interacts strongly with the Christian doctrine of God. The one is a touchstone for the other. We have had to discuss in some detail matters that do not at first seem to have a great deal to do with prayer. In the light of this discussion, however, we can now begin to identify some of the key components that belong to a theology of petitionary and intercessory prayer.

The first is a recognition of the role played by *the will of God*. Our examination in Chapter 2 of the prayer life of Jesus as presented in the Gospel of Luke showed that, while Luke may have Christological matters to the fore in his presentation of Jesus as an intercessor, thus introducing an element of uniqueness into his portrait of Jesus as a person who prays, nevertheless Luke does also have a concern to present Jesus as a model of piety. In particular, we saw that Luke wishes to present both the prayer life of Jesus and Jesus' own teaching about prayer as a corrective to popular misunderstandings concerning the practice of intercession. Luke is especially concerned to exclude magical views of prayer. The decisive factor for Luke in the answering of prayer is the will of God rather than that of the one who prays. Indeed, prayer may be an opportunity for God to respond to human asking in ways that are unexpected but which nevertheless accord with God's will rather than the will of the one who prays. This means that one crucial element in intercessory prayer must be the willingness first to learn from God as God's will is sought through the act of praying. The challenge of prayer lies in the willingness to yield to what God wills rather than persist until it is God who yields. Prayer in such a case then becomes a means of receiving what God wants to give.

This is part of the truth in the view of prayer that sees it as being therapeutic so far as the one who prays is concerned. Prayer is indeed a way of aligning oneself with the will of God and also of committing oneself to the doing of that will so far as it is possible for the one who prays to do so. But it also clear from a reading of Luke–Acts that God does respond in positive ways, beyond that of the immediate experience of the intercessor, to prayers that are in accordance with the divine will. Even the granting of a knowledge of that will might be seen as a real intervention by God in human life. The clue to the nature of such an intervention is found in the emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit which Luke frequently mentions in contexts where prayer also occurs. Indeed, Luke suggests that the supreme answer to prayer is the gift of God's own self through the Holy Spirit.

This Lukan emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in connection with prayer was juxtaposed with the Pauline material on prayer and the Spirit. St. Paul conceives prayer as an activity of the divine in human beings, so that intercessory prayer becomes an extension of Christ's own heavenly intercession. However, Paul not only sees the Spirit as linking the divine and human in prayer; by means of prayer, humans are linked with one another in a network of mutual intercession through which the power of God is released by the Spirit's agency. Furthermore, because the concept of 'spirit' expresses kinship between the divine and the human in general, it is possible to see how this network may extend beyond the boundaries of the Christian community indwelt by the Spirit. It is not only that answers to prayer may come about through human persons as the Spirit impinges upon them; it is also that, in as much as spirit language is applied in Scripture to the whole range of human activity, we may see intercessory prayer making an impact upon the totality of human life, and indeed also upon the non-human creation through the influence of human persons upon it. To summarize earlier conclusions concerning a biblical model of intercessory prayer, therefore, we may say that it is the use of Spirit language that makes such a model coherent.

It may have become clear to the reader that these biblical insights may be tied into some of the other conclusions reached in this study. One of these, expounded in Chapter 3, is that intercession is *an activity of persons*, and needs to be seen in the light of a relationship between human persons and God who is also seen to be personal. It must be repeated here that, by 'person', we do not mean an autonomous individual subject in isolation from others, which is how the term has come to be understood today in Western culture generally. Rather, the concept of person makes sense only when seen in the context of relationship. To pray is to be caught up into a network of relationships, not only between human beings, but also into the Trinitarian life of God in whom the persons are to be conceived in terms of movements in relationships (Fiddes, 2000).

It is in the context of personal relationship that the traditional divine attributes of omnipotence, omniscience and perfect goodness can be reinterpreted, without having to reduce prayer to the level of therapeutic meditation or rendering it unnecessary altogether (on the grounds that God as traditionally understood might be expected to give what is needed without being asked). Certain things may be granted to people who pray only when God is asked for them. This asking is the necessary condition for God to respond by giving what is needed. It expresses the personal nature of the relationship between God and the one who prays and is also a means of strengthening that relationship. The requirement that God is to be asked before intervening in human lives is a safeguard against either spoiling or dominating the person who stands in a personal relationship with God. It could also be seen as a diminishment of personhood if God intervened on all occasions without being asked.

Such considerations appear to work well in the context of petitionary prayer for one's own needs, but some further modification is required in the case of intercession for others. It might be thought that for God to intervene in a human life without being asked is a violation of human freedom. However, we conceived

some analogous situations where intervention might not have been requested by the individual concerned but where the action could possibly result in an enhancement of the freedom and well-being of the person. It is also helpful in such instances to draw a distinction between God's bringing about what a person needs even when that person has not asked God for it and God's giving in a personal way in response to prayer. That some who do consciously stand in a mutual personal relationship with God receive some things without asking God for them, and that others who do not claim such a relationship to God also appear to have their needs supplied without themselves having asked for them (though God may have been asked for them on their behalf by others), does not make petitionary and intercessory prayer redundant provided we keep this distinction in mind. God's gifts can be received in a personal way only when a personal relationship to God is acknowledged. The prayer of asking for oneself or for others is an expression of such a personal relationship with God and a means of strengthening it.

In the course of the study, attention was given to the thought of some theologians of the personalist school from both Britain and America. John Oman, whose theology starts with reflection on human experience rather than from abstract a priori notions, did not see prayer as a means of getting God to do what we want but as a way of aligning ourselves with, and committing ourselves to action in relation to, the will of God. To Oman, prayer is not a short-cut to getting what we want done, but rather a receiving of what God wants to give us. This is fine so far as it goes, but there is more to say about the nature of petitionary and intercessory prayer, as it is hoped this study has shown. However, Oman has made an important contribution to our understanding of divine grace. In Oman's 'thoroughly personalist way of speaking about God', grace can never be coercive and is always persuasively personal.

A major American contribution to the debate about prayer was that offered by H.E. Fosdick. Like his fellow personalists in America, Fosdick puts an emphasis on the development of personality and sees God in personal terms. He agrees with Oman that prayer as a means of getting things done is bound to disappoint, but more than Oman he is prepared to assert that prayer is not just an exercise in self-improvement. Prayer, says Fosdick, cannot change God's purpose although it may release it, because it is a form of cooperation with God whereby God gets things done. While intercessory prayer is not a way of persuading a reluctant God to act, it does open up ways for God to work. However, such views might be taken with Oman's as restricting God's activity too much to the subjective realm.

Another (British) personalist contribution to the debate is that of H.H. Farmer who, in a way similar to Oman, conceives God as personal will who is known in situations where personal choices and decisions have to be made. God as 'absolute demand and final succour' is conceived by Farmer, as in other personalist theologies, as one who works by persuasion and not by coercion. Prayer, for Farmer, is rooted in the religious awareness of God as personal and makes possible the realization of the divine purpose through personal cooperation with God. At one point Farmer advocates a metaphysic similar to Leibniz' monadology, and this enables him to suggest that prayer makes an impact on the world through the

rapport God has with every creature. Such thinking links with the conclusion drawn from the biblical material concerning the formation of a network of mutual intercession. It also has affinities with the thought of John Macmurray, to whom we shall turn shortly, and also with that of process theology. The point may be summed up here by suggesting that, if prayer 'works', it does so because all human persons are related to one another through relationship to a personal God who stands in the same mutual relation to all other persons.

It is John Macmurray who provides a philosophical and metaphysical foundation for the personal relationship with God that is expressed through prayer. For Macmurray, personal existence is constituted by the relation of persons. He conceives the Self not as a Knower, as in rationalist philosophy, but rather as a Doer, an *Agent*. Macmurray's analysis of the concept of an agent leads to the affirmation of the world as a single action conceived as the act of God, a universal Agent, that universal and personal Other to whom all other persons stand in identical mutual personal relation. This language of agents and persons is utterly relevant to an understanding of prayer to a personal God, since prayer is a way of entering into personal communion with God and of seeking to understand and fulfil the divine intentions. It also helps us to see that prayer is essentially a corporate activity, since personal existence is itself communal. Furthermore, if God is in some mutual relation to all other persons then it becomes possible to conceive how our intercessions affect the lives of others, since we and they stand in the same personal relationship to God.

Of course, the prayer of intercession has a higher probability of effectiveness when the person prayed for also acknowledges a personal relationship to God, since such a person is more open to receive what God wants to give. But even when the personal relationship to God is not acknowledged there remains a possibility of intercessory prayer being to some degree effective because the person prayed for is still in some sort of relationship to God. As we have already suggested, all this has affinities with the conclusion drawn from the examination of the biblical material that, through prayer, there is established through the Spirit a network of mutual intercession through which God may act. It will also be seen in due course that it is comparable to the way process theology conceives intercessory prayer. In other words, prayer belongs to the interaction of human persons with God and with one another.

To sum up this part of our recapitulation of the previous discussion, the account of petitionary and intercessory prayer given by the personalist school is a reasonably satisfying and coherent one. Its largely 'from below to above' methodology is justifiable and a metaphysical foundation for it can be established. It supports the conclusion that God's action is primarily through persons, and asserts that human cooperation with God lies at the heart of the concept of intercession. The effectiveness of intercession depends not only on the cooperation with God of those who pray, but also on that of those prayed for. In this way, and because personalists insist that God works through persuasion and not through coercion, magical views of prayer are ruled out. Prayer lets God into a situation in a way that may not otherwise have been possible, so that in response to prayer God

may effect some change in the material order of the world. But as to how God so effects such changes we must turn, next, to a summary of our conclusions concerning the relation of prayer and the providential activity of God and, eventually, to a summary of the contribution of process theology.

Intercessory and petitionary prayer also presupposes the possibility of *divine action in the world*, but this raises questions about the nature of that activity. We saw in Chapter 5 that prayer belongs within the orbit of what is called ‘special’ providence, as opposed to ‘general’ providence. Special providence has to do with specific events that reflect the specific decisions of a personal God. In the course of this discussion it was suggested that, while God may well be able to ‘steer’ the course of the world through prayer, it is primarily by influencing human persons that God does so. This is linked to the concept of double agency to which we shall come shortly.

In the course of this discussion of divine providence a number of contributions to the debate were judged to be unhelpful to the formulation of an understanding of intercessory prayer. The particular contributions falling under this judgment are those of Schubert Ogden, Gordon Kaufman and Maurice Wiles, all of whom seek to interpret divine action in as general a way as possible.[1] These theologians in their different ways all seem to suggest that what is conceived of as ‘an act of God’ is simply the meaning ascribed to an event by human beings in the light of faith. Divine action cannot be considered as causally efficient but functions, rather, as a final cause supplying the vision by which human beings are inspired to perform God’s will. On this view, therefore, there can be room for prayer only as a means of sharpening human ability to interpret events in such a way and as a means of receiving divine grace to discern the will of God and to carry it out. While such ideas undoubtedly have their place within an overall understanding of prayer, they are unacceptable if this is all that there is to be said about the nature of prayer.

Karl Barth’s contribution seemed at first sight to offer more promise for the enabling of an understanding of the relationship between prayer and the providential activity of God. But although Barth asserts that God works primarily by influencing persons, he leaves the relationship between divine and human activity rather vague. Furthermore, in Barth’s concept of prayer, there is little room for the free initiative of responsible human beings. Like Barth, and from the same Reformed tradition, Paul Helm also leaves too much in relation to both providence and prayer to be determined by God and too little to human beings. As well as compromising human freedom, the views of both Barth and Helm also appear, in the light of the divine goodness, to make unacceptable concessions in relation to the problem of evil.

So the most fruitful framework for an understanding of prayer in relation to the providential activity of God remains that provided by the concept of double action, as first introduced by Farrer and as developed more recently by Brümmer. This view of providence asserts that for the most part God works in the world indirectly through human actions, with the relationship between God and human beings being conceived as one of cooperation rather than manipulation. However, as originally enunciated by Farrer, the theory of double action is vulnerable to the

criticism that it leaves the ‘causal joint’ between divine and human action exposed and unexplained. It may also be said to be vulnerable to the exercise of Occam’s razor: do human actions need any more explanation than that they are the outcome of human decisions? However, in his development of Farrer’s ideas, Brümmer helpfully brings out a distinction between the necessary and sufficient conditions for a human action to be performed, the full range of which includes the free decision of the human will to perform the action. Brümmer suggests that God may influence us by providing the necessary, but not fully sufficient, external conditions for human agents to perform the divine will. Furthermore, it is also possible to select from this range of necessary conditions one that may be judged to be overwhelmingly important, with the result that God may be given credit for a particular event without denying human freedom and responsibility. Moreover, this one outstanding necessary condition for a human action may be provided by God in response to human prayer, as we in turn freely offer ourselves to God through our prayer on behalf of the persons and situations for which we pray. Thus the best way of expressing what is going on in intercessory and petitionary prayer is to say that the prayer has had an effect on the relationship between the one who prays and God, rather than on just God alone, or on the person who prays alone.

This view of the relationship between divine and human action and the place of prayer within it reinforces the point that God only ever works by persuasion and not by coercion. This, of course, is a point fundamental to the process view of the universe to which we shall shortly come. Before we do so it is necessary to answer some criticisms. Paul Fiddes (2000, pp.139–44) mentions three. Firstly, is a God who works only by persuasion powerful enough to be all that God is held to be? In reply he suggests that worldly concepts of power may not be appropriate when applied to God and, furthermore, the concept of persuasive influence, when applied to God, includes the concept of infinite patience so that it could be said that in divine persuasion God always retains the initiative. The second criticism is that, if God’s action is always persuasive, and therefore resistible both in principle and in fact, can we be sure that God will ever be able to fulfil the divine purpose for creation? In reply, Fiddes agrees that the risk is real, but that it is not total because God knows the strength of an infinitely persuasive love. Furthermore, as in William James’ famous analogy of the chess game (James, 1968, pp.62ff) the route to the destination depends on human choices, so that there is an open-endedness concerning the end which may be a blend of triumph and tragedy. This, thirdly, raises the question of divine foreknowledge, the distinction between knowledge of past and present actualities and of future possibilities, and the relationship of God to time, all of which have been fully discussed elsewhere in this study.

We may therefore conclude from this brief résumé of the discussion of prayer in relation to the providential activity of God that, in spite of certain objections, it is indeed plausible to suppose that God acts by exercising a direct influence on persons. God may also indirectly influence persons by providing the necessary external conditions for human beings to act in accordance with the divine will. And both forms of divine influence may sometimes be in response to prayer.

An understanding of the nature of prayer must also take into account the *ability of God to receive influences from the world and be changed by them*. As described and discussed in Chapter 4 above, the classical doctrines of divine impassibility and immutability call into question the very possibility of any concept of intercessory and petitionary prayer. An unchanging and unchangeable God would appear to be unable to respond to human petitions, although many early upholders of the doctrine of divine impassibility seemed to be unaware of the theoretical problem involved when they prayed. One way of overcoming this problem (and several others, as we have seen) is to promote a view of prayer that is merely self-therapeutic, so that the effect of the prayer is held to be only upon the person who prays and not on God. Prayer conceived in such a way is regarded simply as being expressive of certain feelings or attitudes about the world, a means of aligning oneself with God's will and committing oneself to performing it in relation to the people and situations envisaged in the prayer. Such ideas certainly do belong to a full understanding of the nature of intercessory prayer, but they are not the whole story and it is both unnecessary and unsatisfactory to restrict the meaning of prayer in this fashion.

While the doctrine of divine impassibility has certain strengths that need to be maintained, especially the way it preserves the insight that God is not to be deflected from the divine purpose nor diverted from acting in justice and holy love, it has been drastically modified in recent times, and even abandoned. Historical factors, such as genocide, the prevalence of war on a worldwide scale and a realization of the extent of human suffering, have had their part to play, but theological and philosophical factors have also been at work. One theological approach to the issues involved here starts from a consideration of the phenomenology of love. Because a personal love involves the one who loves in suffering, God as love cannot but be open to the possibility of being affected by the suffering of human beings. The assertion that God is incapable of suffering thus seems to contradict the assertion that God is love. Another approach, promoted in their different ways by Jürgen Moltmann and Paul Fiddes, starts from the suffering of Jesus upon the cross and, linking this with a consideration of the doctrine of the Trinity, leads to the outcome that a passible, suffering God knows and understands the human condition from within the divine being. The conclusion to be drawn from all this must be that, since the doctrine of divine impassibility can no longer be held in the terms in which it was once held, intercessory prayer cannot be ruled out on the grounds that God, being impassible, is incapable of responding to our prayers. Rather, God is free both to change, and to allow the divine being to be changed, in response to prayer. This implies that God is also free, if God so wills, to allow the divine activity in the world to change in response to human intercession.

Such a conclusion rests upon the belief that God always remains in control of the divine being. The assertion of absolute divine freedom seems to rule out the possibility that prayer *causes* a change in God. Many would claim that the doctrine of divine impassibility is a safeguard against any implication that God is acted upon causally by the world. However, we have already recognized that it might

prove difficult for us in practice to distinguish clearly between causal influence upon God by external factors and God's own free decision to change in response to those external factors. There is, therefore, an unresolved tension between Marcel Sarot's view that the influence of the world upon God is always under the control of the divine will and the view of process theology which virtually asserts that God is causally affected by the world. Paul Fiddes seems to support this latter view in his words, quoted earlier: 'a suffering God is a God who is changed by the world, who is even under constraint from it' (Fiddes, 1988, p.45).

Sarot's denial that God may be changed by the world in a causal fashion arises out of his view that a causal relation can only be one in which one's will is totally overwhelmed by another. But such a view is questionable, because it appears to rest upon a confusion between what is *determined* and what is *caused*. We may indeed wish to rule out the kind of causal effect upon God which could overwhelm God's will, as this suggests that the world determines the divine being. But it would be wrong to rule out altogether any kind of causal influence by the world upon God. Furthermore, there are problems in connection with Sarot's view that the influence of the world upon God is always under the control of the divine will. He rejects the notion of a once-and-for-all *self-limitation* on the part of God in the light of creaturely freedom and opts instead for a view of divine *self-restraint* which involves God in a continuous exercise of the divine will in which God always retains control. This leads Sarot to the conclusion that God can end self-restraint whenever God wants. However, such a view makes the problem of human suffering more acute, for we must ask why, if God can end self-restraint at any time, God does not end the divine self-restraint in order to prevent the occurrence of great evil. The only answer must have much to do with divine respect for human freedom. In this light, the notion of a once-and-for-all divine self-limitation, as opposed to divine self-restraint, becomes more attractive. Moreover, divine suffering could not be said to be remotely comparable with human suffering if God remains in control of God's own passibility. Such a view undermines the belief that God knows, understands and sympathizes with human suffering. The concept of divine self-restraint also detracts from the immediacy of the divine awareness of the world, since it suggests some sort of 'filter' through which God receives some influences and rejects others. It is thus incompatible with the metaphor of the world as God's body which involves an immediacy of feeling, with God's knowledge of the world analogous to our direct, intimate and immediate awareness of the insides of our own bodies.

Finally, the view put forward above that God is limited in knowing the future only as possibility and not as actuality also conflicts with the view that God always keeps control of the divine passibility. If it is only as possibilities become actual that God knows which possibilities will, in fact, become actual, it is difficult to conceive how the influence upon God of those possibilities becoming actual could be under the control of the divine will. It is hard to imagine how God might be 'in control' of influences upon the divine being arising from possibilities whose actualization even God does not know in advance whether it will happen or not.

For these reasons, the process view of reality in which all actual entities including God receive efficient causation from others while retaining self-

causation is to be preferred. Process theology, which conceives of every entity affecting all other entities, does indeed suggest a mechanism for prayer because of the way in which it conceives the interaction between God and the world. But it would be important to retain an aspect which provides room for the will or purpose of God in shaping or transforming the worldly influences that are received into the divine consequent nature. Likewise, to conceive of God forming or synthesizing initial or ideal aims within the divine primordial nature only makes sense when we conceive of the will of God having a role in the shaping of those aims.

In the light of these conclusions we now proceed to a summary of the way in which prayer may be conceived in terms of the metaphysics of *process thought*. Process theology has the merit of overcoming some of the objections to the traditional theistic view of the relationship between God and the world. In traditional theism, God's relationship to the world is voluntaristic, external and, possibly, coercive, so that God can override normal causal processes whenever God chooses to do so. But there is a price to be paid for such a view. Not only does it both undervalue and undermine human responsibility, thus generating consequences that are ethical in nature, but it also raises problems of both a philosophical and a theological nature. Moreover, the ascription of overwhelming power to God raises in an acute fashion the problem of evil. Again, traditional theism is often accompanied by a dualistic, mechanistic view of the universe which has not only tended towards deism but has also posed great difficulties in conceiving how God may act in the world. The question therefore arises whether a different metaphysic, in particular the one provided by process thought, might not provide a more satisfactory account of these issues.

In the process world-view each actual entity influences and is influenced by all other actual entities. God, as a constant factor in the environment of every creature, is not an exception to this. Direct divine influence on all things, and of all things on God, is an essential feature of the universe in process thought, but because causation is a matter of influence and persuasion and is never coercive, God's power is not unlimited. Creatures with the power to actualize themselves are free to accept or reject the possibilities ('lures') presented to them by God. Another implication is that, if God is influenced by the world as well as influencing it, then God is not impassible.

This suggests a dynamic by which prayer may be conceived as having an impact both upon God and, through God, upon the world. Some process thinkers promote a view of God as the 'soul' of the world which is seen in turn as God's 'body'. A few develop this concept further into a pan-psychic view of reality which, although it may stretch the incredulity of some, nevertheless underlines the way in which process theology can accommodate features excluded by other metaphysical accounts of the world. Whatever else may be said, however, some concept of intercessory prayer need not be foreign to a universe conceived in terms of process thought. Of course, this process view is not without its problems. One that was identified was the theistic appropriateness of God making a specific response to each and every event, however small and apparently trivial. However,

it was argued that there is no need to rule out the specificity of the divine lures, with the consequent ruling out of the possibility of intercessory prayer. Indeed, some theologians of the process school do not appear to have any problems in making room for prayer within their metaphysical framework.

An additional advantage of process thought is the way in which it reinterprets the divine attributes, with results that are not dissimilar from those arrived at by theologians with a more traditional approach. Divine omnipotence is seen as a persuasive influence rather than as a coercive force, suggesting that no amount of prayer will ever be able to override creaturely freedom to accept or reject divine lures. In connection with the omniscience of God, process thought distinguishes between God's knowledge of actualities and God's knowledge of possibilities. Not knowing which possibilities will, in the event, be actualized, God's knowledge of actualities is thus relative to what is the case, and increases as more and more possibilities become actual. In the Whiteheadian view there can be no question of prayer making available new, divinely unenvisaged possibilities, since all possibilities are lodged in the primordial nature of God. This means, on this view, that, taking into account the way process theology conceives the divine omnipotence and omniscience, all that process theology may be able to affirm concerning intercessory prayer is that it may strengthen possibilities that are already present. This may well be sufficient for our purposes. If we follow Hartshorne, however, it may be possible to say in addition that prayer may open the door to possibilities not previously envisaged by God.

The view of the world as God's body, as proposed by some process thinkers, suggests a conception of prayer which belongs to the conscious awareness of the divine and allows for a response by God to messages from human beings analogous to the way their minds respond to messages from their bodies via the nervous system. However, in view of present limitations in scientific understanding of the interaction of mind and body, this cannot yet be regarded as a fully clear model for an understanding of divine activity in relation to the world. This means that the best process model for the interpretation of prayer remains its fundamental view of reality in which every entity affects all other entities. Both our prayer and the situation for which we pray are prehended into the divine consequent nature, and the divine primordial nature supplies the ideal possibility which, if freely accepted by the prayed-for, will provide the 'answer' to the prayer. This ideal possibility, or initial aim, is 'woven' by God out of the totality of the situation in the world, which includes those who pray, their prayers and the those they pray for. Prayer, thus added to the reality of the world with which God works, belongs to the interaction of the Creator and creatures, and has an effect both on God and on the world. However, in view of the fact that an answer to prayer may depend on the response to divine lures of others than the one who prays and the prayed-for, there can be no answer-guaranteed view of prayer in the process understanding of the matter. As was suggested above, all that we may be able to say is that the effect of prayer increases the likelihood of response (which is always a free response) through a strengthening of certain possibilities that are presented to the world by God in response to the prayer.

At several points in the argument we have hinted at the possibility of God's action on the non-human creation as well as on the human. We have spoken, for instance, of God 'steering' nature as well as history, and of the way in which God may provide the necessary external conditions for a human action. One advantage of process thought is that it conceives a direct divine influence upon all things and not only personal beings. In the process understanding of reality there is an element of responsiveness in each and every entity. Personal beings, of course, are likely to be most responsive to the divine lures and thus able to respond in the most enrichingly creative ways, so that the effectiveness of intercession will be greatest where human beings are the object of such prayer. However, direct divine action in relation to the non-human creation is conceivable within the horizon of process thought, although it is more likely that the impact of intercessory prayer in such cases will be indirect, being mediated through human beings who have been influenced by God as the result of the prayer.

It is therefore possible to conclude that a consistent and coherent account of petitionary and intercessory prayer can be given in terms of process thought. Not only does such an account overcome some of the problems when prayer is considered in terms of classical theism, but process thought also suggests a mechanism for prayer because it is able to give an account of the interaction between God and the world in a way that other systems of thought do not. Process theology encourages us to pray, rather than dissuading us from it, because of the way it conceives God as both influencing the world and being influenced by it.

It has been argued in this book that a fully coherent and satisfying conception of intercessory prayer may be reached in the light of modern biblical, theological and philosophical understanding. Prayer may be seen as a means by which God enlists the freely given cooperation of human beings in the realization of the divine purposes. It gets certain things done in a way that might not have been fully possible had the prayer not been made. This is so because intercessory prayer, as a personal partnership between God, the one who prays and, ideally, the prayed-for, reinforces the personal nature of the universe, aiming at producing more fully personal human beings in communion with one another and with God. It is thus a prime instance of faith working through love. Persons who pray may have every confidence in interceding with a God who is conceived as being personal and with whom, in particular, every other person stands in a personal relationship. They may also have every expectation that their prayers will make a difference in the world through the God who both influences and is influenced by the creation.

Note

1 For another critique of this position, see Paul Fiddes (2000, pp.126–30). The whole of Fiddes' chapter 4, pp.115ff (entitled 'The God who Acts and the Point of Intercessory Prayer') is relevant to our discussion and does not come to any essentially different conclusions than those reached here.

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Index